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Habib El-Adli, portrait of the week by Bahgory 8

US pressure

ISRAELI Foreign Minister David Levy and Palestinian negotiator Mahmoud Abbas met yesterday in Jerusalem to discuss interim peace issues, including further redeployment, in the hope of working out an agreement that would allow for the full resumption of peace talks deadlocked for 10 months.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu was due to discuss the long delayed interim handover with the full cabinet on Sunday before meeting US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in Brussels on 16 December. Netanyahu insisted yesterday that the decision would be based on Israel's national and security interests, but the daily *Ha'aretz* said he was under immense US pressure to increase his offer of redeploying in six to eight per cent of the West Bank to a transfer of 12 per cent. Palestinians have demanded up to 30 per cent.

Census row

PALESTINIAN census takers yesterday began the first official count of residents of the Occupied Territories in 30 years, while the Israeli government rushed to adopt emergency legislation to prevent Palestinians from conducting the census in East Jerusalem. Preliminary results of the count, carried out by the Palestinian Central Statistics Bureau and financed by European governments, are due to be released on 4 January.

Hassan Abu Libdah, head of the Statistics Bureau, described the census as a step towards building sovereignty. Meanwhile Israeli Justice Minister Tsahi Hanegbi canvassed cabinet ministers by telephone overnight in the hope of holding all three readings on a draft bill in parliament within the next few hours that will bar census takers from East Jerusalem.

'Our position'

IN A DECLARATION issued in Cairo this week, a coalition of Egyptian feminists and activists working for the eradication of female genital mutilation (FGM) lashed out at their "supporters" among feminist and human rights organisations in the West, accusing them of inconsistency and of "sensationalising" FGM.

The declaration, issued under the title "Our Position on FGM" by the FGM Taskforce — an umbrella group including representatives of some two dozen non-governmental organisations — criticised "non-Egyptian actors" who are quick to condemn FGM as a violation of human rights, and yet "[closing] an eye to health policies which deprive poor women of their basic right of access to the minimal requirements of primary health care."

The position paper also lambasted calls to use foreign aid as a pressure tool against the Egyptian government to act more forcefully to ban FGM. Such calls were made recently in the US Congress. In an implicit reference to Northern human rights and feminist groups, the position paper described as "unacceptable" recent appeals issued by these groups calling upon President Mubarak to overturn a judicial ruling favouring FGM. Such appeals, the position paper said, were in violation of the separation of powers and "the principles of democracy which generations in this country have been fighting for".

A stake in Islam's future

In hosting the Organisation of the Islamic Conference Iran appears to be emerging from two decades of isolation. **Dina Ezzat** reports from Tehran

Giant pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of Iran's Islamic revolution, bedeck the streets of Tehran as it hosts, for the first time, a summit of the 55-member Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

But, apart from a few pedestrians and a handful of cars, the streets are almost empty. Revolutionary guards line the sidewalks, grim-faced, keeping a watchful eye on the motorcades of over 30 heads-of-state and government, together with other heads of delegations, taking part.

The Iranian government announced a four-day public holiday for the duration of the summit, which opened on Tuesday following a week of preparatory work by experts and foreign ministers. The summit ends today.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is using the summit to bring Tehran back into the limelight, while at the same time sending an obvious message to Washington, which remains committed to a policy of "double containment" against both Iran and Iraq.

An editorial that appeared on Tuesday in the English-language *Iran Daily* hailed the arrival of so many heads-of-state and dignitaries to take part in the first such big event to be held in Tehran since the Islamic Republic was founded in 1979. The event, the newspaper said, was a "clear sign that, contrary to what the West is trying to portray, Iran is not isolated."

Among the participants were Presidents Hafez Al-Assad of Syria, Suleiman Demirel of Turkey and Omar Al-Bashir of Sudan. Crown Prince Abdallah of Saudi Arabia was also here, the first visit by a high-ranking official from the oil-rich kingdom since the revolution.

Also in Tehran for the summit were Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Heading the Egyptian delegation was Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, who met yesterday with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, the summit's chairman, to convey the sincere wishes of President Hosni Mubarak.

The Iranian press took pains to underline that the summit was a successful government-run show. "The interest shown by the Western media in the summit is mainly based on a head-count of participants. The large number of attendants is in obvious contrast to the boycott of last month's US-sponsored Middle East/North Africa economic conference in Qatar," one commentator said.

But the eighth OIC summit was not convened simply to tease the US and Israel. It also addressed pressing issues within the Islamic world — among them the state of Middle East peace-making, the situation in Kashmir, the sufferings of the Iraqi people under UN-imposed sanctions and the future of peace in Bosnia.

Attempts were also made to bridge some gaps in bilateral relations: President Assad met with Arafat, Moussa met with the Iranian and Sudanese presidents and Abdallah met with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's spiritual leader. The Saudi Crown Prince was reported to have offered to launch a mediation effort to improve relations between Tehran and Washington.

The summit also underlined the need to rejuvenate the OIC, founded 28 years ago, and reformulate its role for the next century. "We came to the summit to pass more than 140 resolutions that deal with about 130 political, economic and legal items, but we don't have time to examine all these issues at length," said Moussa. "With the exception of a handful of resolutions, in which each group of states takes an interest, the rest will end up on the shelf, with nobody paying attention to them."

Moussa, noting that the image of Islam is being tarnished from inside and outside the Islamic world, said that what is at stake is the future of Islam as a civilisation. "The clash of civilisations is an issue that the West is addressing now, and it is up to us to make sure that Islam does not end up looking like a religion of reactionary thought," Moussa argued. "This should be the main task of the OIC in the future."

The same sentiment will be echoed in the Tehran Declaration that will be issued today at the summit's conclusion. The Declaration which, according to diplomatic rules, is authored by the host country, will also address the key political issues that came up for discussion.

The general consensus among observers and officials is that the Iranians have pulled off something of a coup. And they did it despite the US, which Khomeini once described as the "worst enemy of the poor and weak Muslim nation." (see p.4)



Rehearsals for the memorial service for victims of the terrorist attack in Luxor on 17 November. Included among the musical tributes were Um Kulthoum's ode *Misr Tatahaddath 'an Nafsiha* (Egypt Speaks about Itself) and Abdel-Halim Hafez's *'Adda Al-Nahar* (The Day Went By) and sections of Verdi's *Requiem*

photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Message from Thebes

Led by President Mubarak, Egyptians are lighting candles and laying wreaths of flowers to commemorate the victims of the Luxor massacre. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** joins the ceremony

Last night about 4,000 Egyptians and a handful of foreigners were expected to gather at the Temple of Hatshepsut opposite Luxor. Throughout its history, the temple has been a place of healing, and following the 17 November massacre of 58 tourists and four Egyptians, the need to heal wounds has seldom been greater.

The ceremony, intended to give vent both to feelings of outrage at the terrorist act, and express solidarity with the families of the victims will, in the words of Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz, send "a message from Thebes" to the world — a world which shares the "outrage and sorrow" of ordinary Egyptians at the dreadful act committed on their soil.

"The grief of the families of the victims is our own grief. Here, from the Valley of the Queens, we convey to the whole world our sorrow at what happened and our condolences," said Mahfouz in a taped statement. The statement was later to be read in English and French by Omar Sharif.

"This tribute conveys a message that Egypt is bent on uprooting terrorism. There is no better proof of nationwide condemnation than a public rally, headed by President Mubarak, and entirely dedicated to honouring the victims," Culture Minister Farouk Hosni told reporters during a dress rehearsal on Tuesday night.

"It is not only an outpouring of sentiment, but also a sense of duty," Mustafa Nagui, head of the Cairo Opera House, said. "We had to find a way to keep alive the memory of the people who loved Egypt and died on its land."

The 50-minute ceremony was expected to be attended by President Hosni Mubarak who, according to Culture Ministry sources, was to lay a white rose and light a candle in remembrance of the victims.

The sources said invitations were sent out to a wide range of personalities, including actor Adel Imam, cinema director Youssef Chahine and members of the Press Syndicate's Council as well as Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi of Al Azhar Mosque and Pope Shenoudah III of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Also invited were some 30 ambassadors, including those who represent the countries of the fallen victims.

"We wanted to invite as many people as we could, from all walks of life, to tell the world that this country does not support terrorism, and that this message is coming from the people," said Samir Gharib, head of the Cultural Development Fund.

During Tuesday's rehearsal, each of the participants was given a rose and a candle as they filed into the temple. The ceremony began with an orchestra playing the "martyrs' anthem," followed by a broadcast of Mahfouz's statement. Then, the Arab Music Troupe chanted a number of national songs, such as "Rise my country, peace be upon you, peace be upon the land of my ancestors."

Following the songs President Mubarak and other high officials are expected to proceed to the central court of the temple — where Hatshepsut planted incense trees imported from the land of Punt — to lay flowers and observe a minute of silence.

As Nubian music rises to a crescendo, the attendants will move forward up the ramp leading to the upper terrace to light candles at a temporary memorial shaped like a palm-tree and then come down to place flowers at the scene of the slaughter.

On Tuesday night, strict security measures were introduced. People entering the temple for the dress rehearsal were thoroughly searched. Three police checkpoints were set up along the road leading to the temple. The mountain area behind the temple was flood-lit.

Luxor, abandoned by tourists following the carnage, remains engulfed by bitterness and grief. "Only time will heal the sorrows inflicted upon the city which was once the hub of a thriving tourism industry," said Rob McCarthy, the American manager of a hotel.

He suggested that an anti-terrorism memorial be built near the temple, with a plaque on which the names of the victims are engraved. "Such a memorial will tell it all," McCarthy said. "It will remain a sign that we have taken a stand against terrorism. Something good has to come out of this whole tragedy." (see p.2)

INSIDE

Parliament scrutinises policing policies

At a stormy parliamentary meeting, police practices came under fire while Interior Minister El-Adli urged MPs to assist his forces. **Gamal Essam El-Din** attended

A special parliamentary committee began a series of debates this week with those cabinet ministers responsible for the government's strategy in fighting terrorism. The committee, which was formed following the Luxor massacre, plunged straight into business last Saturday by meeting with Habib El-Adli, the newly-appointed interior minister.

As expected, the four-hour meeting was a stormy affair. Before he could set about expounding his new security plan, El-Adli faced accusations of human rights violations committed by police forces in Upper Egypt. The parliamentary representatives of the area cited numerous examples of police torture, random arrests in pre-dawn trawls, and detention without trial.

Qadri El-Azzazi, an MP for Sohag Governorate, said terrorism in Upper Egypt feeds on poverty, illiteracy and the people's humiliation at the hands of police. "Thus, your main job now is to create a new security policy based on reconciliation between police and ordinary citizens in Upper Egypt," he told El-Adli.

The Upper Egypt deputies also warned that police brutality could drive militant violence to new heights and invited El-Adli to reconsider the old policy which gave political security priority over security from crime. However, they did single out for praise El-Adli's decision to remove 21 of the Interior Ministry's top officials and relegate them to insignificant posts.

El-Adli affirmed that his instructions to newly-appointed security officials were precisely to forge a new relationship of mutual respect between police and people. But he urged the Upper Egypt deputies to be "big-hearted" about the ministry's policy of rounding up large numbers of suspects to make sure that terrorists did not escape. "Besides, I don't know what I should say to these killers? Should I talk to them about human rights or should I buy them chocolate?" El-Adli said.

Going on the offensive, El-Adli blamed the Upper Egypt deputies for failing to help the police forces in their efforts to arrest militants who take refuge in mountainous areas and farmlands. "We do not want to rely on [police informers], although they played a role in helping us catch many terrorists. We want the help of the people's deputies, who know their areas well and can lead us to them [i.e. the terrorists]," he said.

El-Adli divided his speech into three parts: information about the Luxor attack, measures taken following the attack and answering MPs' questions. He said that the bodies of four of the six assailants had now been identified. "The identification was made some time ago, but the announcement was delayed because some technical measures had to be carried out to make sure that we reached the right conclusion," El-Adli said. "This was necessary because I was going to announce their names to the whole world. Not only the credibility of the police force, but the credibility of the political regime was at stake."

El-Adli expressed his regret that some people reacted with suspicion when the identities were announced. "These misgivings ignore the long years during which a large number of policemen have fallen as martyrs," he said.

El-Adli said the assailants thought of themselves as "symbols of something big, but the fact remains that they are simply cowardly criminals who did not embrace any special cause." He added that the Interior Ministry has additional information which he, however, could not disclose. He also said that the Interior Ministry did work in close cooperation with other state security agencies "but each has its own area of competence."

The measures taken following the attack included a decision to put police major-generals on trial for the first time, El-Adli said. "This is due to their negligence in securing the area, but the fact remains that it is the police forces that finally confronted the criminals," he added.

El-Adli said the sweeping changes he introduced after taking office "do not mean that the Interior Ministry, before I came, was a refuse dump. No, there is a record and a history of outstanding police performance. Let us all hope that the new security plan will pay off," he said.

According to El-Adli, tourist sites have now been provided with sophisticated security equipment, "but I am not inclined to speak at length about my security plan because this will give the enemy the opportunity to know what I am planning." He added that at a meeting with several foreign ambassadors, chaired by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, the envoys were informed of the new security measures "but not the secret part of our plan."

While the MPs were in agreement that security policies should be reconsidered, particularly in terms of human rights violations, they openly disagreed on the issue of whether the government should open a dialogue with the militants.

Omar Abu-Steit, an MP for Sohag, argued: "If they [the militants] call for applying Islamic *Shari'a*, that's okay. Let's strip them of their main weapon by applying *Shari'a*."

Infuriated by this argument, Mohamed Abdellah, chairman of the foreign affairs committee, responded: "We should not allow ourselves to be dragged onto their turf. If we acknowledge that their demands are Islamic, then they will have succeeded in trapping us. Rather, they should be viewed all the time as terrorists."

El-Adli, agreeing with Abdellah, said a distinction should be drawn between Islam and the militants. "I know them full well. When they recite the Koran, they do not do it in the right way, but in the way their emir has taught them."

Ahmed Omar Hashem, chairman of the religious affairs committee and president of Al-Azhar University, expressed concern about the financial resources of the militant groups. He said that *zakat* [alms] money, collected in some foreign countries, is used to promote terrorism instead of being spent on charity and promoting Islamic teachings.

Hashem also said that fighting terrorism is not the responsibility of the security forces alone. "Each family should fully supervise its children and we should also supervise ourselves," he said.

El-Adli ended the meeting by affirming that "if there were mistakes in the security performance in the past, this does not mean that the past was rife with mistakes all the time."

Three more names

In addition to Medhat Abdel-Rahman, who is believed to have led the attack, the bodies of another three Luxor assailants have been identified. **Mona El-Nahhas** reports

Following a two-week investigation, the Interior Ministry announced the names of three more of the six gunmen who staged the massacre. A fourth, Medhat Abdel-Rahman, widely believed to be their leader, had been identified 24 hours after the 17 November carnage.

According to an Interior Ministry statement, the three assailants whose names were announced last Thursday belong to the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya. All three hailed from the impoverished southern province of Qena and were studying in Assiut.

The three were named as: Hamed Ahmed Erian, 24, a student at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Assiut University; Mahmoud Mohamed Abdel-Kerim, 23, a medical student at Assiut University; and Said Salama Dessouki, 21, a student at an agricultural institute in Assiut.

As to Medhat Abdel-Rahman, he came from the town of El-Badari in the Governorate of Assiut. The Interior Ministry said he was arrested for two months in 1993 for attacking police guards in the Qena governorate. Following his release, he departed for Pakistan and Afghanistan, where he is believed to have received para-military training.

According to Interior Minister Habib El-Adli, the identities of the remaining two gunmen are expected to be established soon. "We have got enough information, but we cannot announce it until we have reached the best results," El-Adli told a parliamentary meeting.

Security authorities have been collecting information about those who might have provided the terrorists with shelter or helped them in any other way to carry out their crime, security sources said.

The assailants are believed to have belonged to a Gama'a faction, led by escaped militant Mahmoud El-Farshouti. The three who have been identified are believed to have established contact with Abdel-Rahman following his return from Pakistan and Afghanistan last year. They were involved in two terrorist attacks in Qena and Sohag governorates a few days before the Luxor carnage. Two policemen were killed in the Qena attack.

Observers believe that the delay in establishing the identities of the assailants, apart from Abdel-Rahman, is due to the fact that they do not have police records.

Security officials said that they managed to identify the three, whose names were announced last Thursday, by collecting and examining evidence the terrorists left at the scene of the crime, which included automatic rifles, fingerprints and two leaflets. The literature showed that the assailants owed allegiance to Mustafa Hamza, the Gama'a's military commander, who is believed to be in Afghanistan. Hamza was involved in an abortive attempt on President Hosni Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa in 1995.

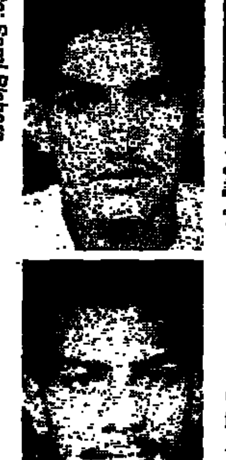
Analysts reached the conclusion that since the three did not have police records, their fingerprints, which were collected from the scene of the crime, had to be checked against millions of fingerprints kept at the civic registry of Upper Egypt before their identities could be established.

Middle class terrorism

Terrorism has often been blamed on poverty and ignorance, but when **Amira Ibrahim** visited the home villages of the recently-identified terrorists, she found that there was nothing under-privileged about their backgrounds



photo: Sami Bishara





Clockwise from far left: Abdel-Kerim's father by his son's study desk; Abdel-Kerim; Dessouki; Erian

The three assailants, whose names were announced last Thursday, hailed from three different villages in the provincial district of Qift in the governorate of Qena. The three graduated from the same secondary school. Hamed Ahmed Erian enrolled in the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Assiut University; Mahmoud Mohamed Abdel-Kerim joined the Faculty of Medicine, Assiut University; and Said Salama Dessouki, who did not manage such high grades, went to study at an agricultural institute. Not only were the three quite clearly well-educated, but they also came from relatively well-to-do families.

A narrow dusty road leads to Al-Zafirya village, 30km from Luxor. In the middle of green fields stands a one-storey house, built of concrete, the land in front pleasantly dotted by palm-trees. This is the home of Dessouki's family — his eight brothers and sisters, mother and uncle.

"Just leave us alone," shouted one of the sisters as this reporter, accompanied by a photographer, approached the house. After initial reluctance, we were allowed inside, sitting down on a *mastaba* made of concrete. For some mysterious reason, the cushions had been removed and placed in a corner.

"It was not our brother who did it," said the sister, who asked that her name be withheld. "We do not believe that he was there to kill. After all, he was not that pious and he did not care much about praying. He once went on a trip with his school to the Luxor temple and, when he came back, he was happy to show off a picture of himself with three tourists."

The sister said that Dessouki, after enrolling in the Assiut institute, used to visit them every two months. "He would listen to tapes of music and songs and sit with us; watching television, singing and dancing. He never made a single remark about the way his sisters dressed or were made up," she said.

The last time he visited was two months ago. There were no signs that he had changed and the family provided him with pocket-money and provisions.

"Stop blaming the family," another sister said. "The government and the university [institute] should be blamed for not carrying out their duties. We always hear about plans and social activities to protect young people. But it was when he moved to Assiut that he fell into the hands of militants. We were never told about his behaviour or that he had stopped attending classes. He must have been brainwashed. This is the only possible explanation."

Nagaa Saad, three kilometres from Al-Zafirya, is another small village, less green and more amply endowed with two-to-three-storey concrete houses. At the end of another dusty road, stands a three-storey house painted yellow and pink. This is where Abdel-Kerim's family lives.

"He could never be a terrorist," said the father with tears in his eyes. "He used to get upset over such attacks, describing them as the killing of innocents."

Abdel-Kerim's only interest, his father continued, was studying. He preferred to spend long hours in his room, reading and studying, to watching television or socialising with friends. But neither did he spend much time at the mosque. As the youngest son, he was looked on fondly and provided with all the money he needed. Moreover, he had inherited a feddan and a half from his late mother and, consequently, never had any money problems.

A few days before the attack, Abdel-Kerim took his father to the eye clinic at the village hospital. On leaving, he took LE700 from his elder brother, a cement trader. This was the last time the family saw him.

"Police took me to the security department, showed me some photographs and asked me to identify my son, but I could not... Deep in my heart, I wished that it was not him. They let me go back home, but detained my three other sons."

Now, the 70-year-old father lives alone at his home, with no one to look after him.

On the other side of the village, down a muddy road lie the houses of Nagaa El-'Org, amongst them Erian's home. He is the fourth of eight brothers and sisters, all of them well-educated. The father, the mayor's deputy, owns six feddans of cultivated land, assuring the family a good livelihood.

But when we tried to approach the house we were chased away by family members who, we were later told, are known in the vicinity as aggressive trouble-makers.

One of Erian's cousins, who agreed to speak to us, said that Erian was arrested a few months ago and was ill-treated by the police while in detention. Following his release, he began to nurse a deep resentment against the security forces.

The Governor of Qena, Safwat Shaker, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the villages of Qift have a higher status than other villages in the area, thanks to a new 500-feddan industrial area and investments approaching LE800 million. They have schools, hospitals and even social clubs. The three terrorists did not suffer from financial or social problems. "They must have been influenced, one way or the other, during their stay in Assiut," Shaker said.

The Gama'a divided

The underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya issued two statements in the space of two days concerning attacks against foreign tourists. As **Khaled Dawoud** found out, the contradictions between them point to a serious split in the leadership

The London-based newspaper *Al-Hayat* published on Monday what it described as a statement by Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, declaring that attacks against tourists would stop and affirming earlier claims by some Gama'a militants that the Luxor massacre was carried out by "young members" acting on their own.

But on Tuesday, another statement, signed by Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, was faxed to foreign news organisations in Cairo, claiming that the first statement was a fake.

Tuesday's statement said: "The newspaper *Al-Hayat* published in its edition of Monday, 8 December 1997 a statement attributed to Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, which was later carried by some international broadcasting stations, condemning the Luxor operation. This statement alleged that the Gama'a will stop targeting the tourism sector in its confrontation with the Egyptian regime. The Gama'a affirms in this connection that this statement was not issued by it, that it was falsely attributed to it and that it has no relation with it."

Tuesday's statement carried the usual hallmarks of the statements received from the clandestine group over the past five years: the Muslim credo of *La-Ilah Illa Allah, Mohamed Rassoul Allah* [there is only one God and Mohamed is his prophet] on the right side of the page and the name of the group "Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya in Egypt" on the left side. The statement was also signed by Al-Gama'a and carried the Muslim and Western calendar dates.

A copy of Monday's statement made available to *Al-Ahram Weekly* did not carry those hallmarks and was not even signed by Al-Gama'a.

Montasser El-Zayyat, a lawyer who was jailed in 1995 for acting as a Gama'a spokesman, told the *Weekly* that Monday's statement was an article which will appear in the Gama'a's magazine, *Al-Morabitoun*, next week. *Al-Morabitoun* is published abroad and it is very difficult to obtain copies in Egypt. Zayyat insisted that Monday's statement was "authentic" and that it was issued by the Gama'a's expatriate leadership.

But even before the Gama'a issued Tuesday's statement, many analysts doubted the authenticity of the preceding declaration.

Monday's statement said that the "Gama'a leaders abroad were surprised by what happened in Luxor and were shocked by the large number of victims and by reports about the mutilation of some bodies. This contradicts the religious, humanitarian and political beliefs of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya in Egypt," the statement said. It added that a claim of responsibility made by the Gama'a one day after the 17 November massacre was fake.

The statement blamed the delay in denying its responsibility for the slaughter on problems of logistics. It said that Gama'a leaders had difficulty in reaching the group's expatriate military commander, Mustafa Hamza, and only managed to do so recently. Once contact was established, "we found out that he denounced what took place in Luxor and that he thought that other brothers in the group issued the claim of responsibility," the statement said.

It said that the Luxor assailants were "young members of the Gama'a who had not been ordered to take action against tourism." A similar claim had been made by a leading group member in an article which appeared in *Al-Morabitoun* last week.

Sources close to the Gama'a said that the author of the article was Osama Rushdi, a Gama'a leader who is reportedly seeking asylum in the Netherlands. The sources said Rushdi could be the author of Monday's statement which will appear in *Al-Morabitoun* next week.

Monday's statement said the group "reviewed its policy of targeting the tourism industry and decided to stop [freeze] its decision of targeting the tourism industry and foreign tourists." The group reversed its position "in order not to allow the Egyptian regime to make use of this incident in ways which we reject," the statement said, alluding to the Luxor massacre.

A source close to the group, quoted by *AFP*, while confirming that Monday's statement was authored by Rushdi, said Tuesday's denial was made by Rifai Ahmed Taha, the group's supreme leader who lives in Afghanistan.

Experts on Islamist militant groups told the *Weekly* that the contradictory statements amounted to a confirmation of reports of a split in the Gama'a's leadership. The division is believed to be between the Gama'a's "historic" leaders, jailed since 1981 for their involvement in the assassination of President Anwar El-Sadat, and expatriate leaders who live mainly in Afghanistan, Pakistan and several European countries.

The Gama'a militants hiding in the hills and farmlands of southern Egypt are believed to receive their orders from the expatriate leadership. "The ones abroad are the ones who have the money and issue the orders," a security source said. "The terrorists in southern Egypt will not listen to jailed leaders because they always suspect that they are being pressured to take a certain position."

The jailed leaders had launched a so-called cease-fire initiative in July, asking their followers to stop anti-government attacks. The unconditional offer was rejected at the time by the expatriate leadership and militant attacks against policemen continued in southern Egypt.

A security source who spoke to the *Weekly* on condition of anonymity cast doubts on the authenticity of Monday's statement. "It says that those who carried out the attack acted on their own. So, how can we believe that they will be able to contact those elements and inform them of their new decision to stop attacks against tourists?" the source said. He added that security forces "do not make plans on the basis of statements from terrorist groups".

During a military trial of 65 Gama'a militants accused of plotting to assassinate top officials last week, their spokesman refused to condemn the Luxor massacre. Mustafa Sayed, a lawyer, claimed that "killing tourists is not a Gama'a policy. We only aim to harm the tourism industry, not foreign tourists. Those who carried out the Luxor attack acted out of frustration."

Sayed defended the group's policy of targeting the tourism industry. "Tourism brings harm, and not benefits, to Egypt. Tourism brings nothing but sex, drugs, alcohol and spies," he told reporters from the iron cage where the defendants stood.

Sayed added that the Gama'a was committed to its cease-fire initiative. "But the government has only to take one positive step and we will take 10," he said, demanding a goodwill gesture from the government, such as the release of thousands of detained militants and a halt to military trials.

Cairo and Doha bury the hatchet

Egypt-Qatar relations are back on track following a reconciliation summit in Riyadh arranged by Saudi Arabia. As clouds give way, **Nevine Khalil** looks back on several weeks of stormy weather



Mubarak and bin Khalifa at the reconciliation summit in Riyadh

After weeks of soaring tension, Egypt and Qatar responded to a Saudi Arabian mediation effort and decided to bury the hatchet at a three-way summit in Riyadh last week. After less than an hour of talks at Al-Yamama Palace in the Saudi capital on 3 December, President Hosni Mubarak, Saudi Arabia's King Fahd and Qatar's Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani announced that the Cairo-Doha dispute had been shelved to make way for the return of Arab solidarity.

Mubarak, who insisted that Sheikh Hamad issue an apologetic statement prior to the summit, spoke "unreservedly" at the meeting about the reasons behind the strain, and found the Qatari Emir "quite receptive" to his comments.

At the root of the war of words between the two countries was Egypt's decision to boycott the fourth Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA IV) hosted by the Gulf state last month. Qatari Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassem accused Egypt of "lying and insulting" Qatar, while Cairo said that bin Jassem "chose to forget his manners". Egypt also recalled its ambassador to Doha twice, both before and after the conference, "for consultations".

"The man has made a mistake and we will deal with him," Foreign Minister Moussa said before last week's summit, adding that bin Jassem "chose to forget his manners and insulted Egypt, its president and people, using language that he should not have used."

Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan, head-of-state of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), then joined the verbal fray, telling reporters in Cairo three weeks ago that Egypt should "forgive [the Qataris] and teach them how to speak properly." Zayed suggested that Egypt "with its 65 million inhabitants cannot be compared to a country whose citizens would fit into a single hotel" — a reference to Qatar's population of 625,000 residents.

In Riyadh, however, "a sincere and cordial atmosphere surrounded the meeting, which led to the relations between the sister states, Egypt and Qatar, being restored to their normal course of love and brotherhood," according to a joint communiqué released at the end of the summit. This outcome, the statement continued, would "enhance Arab cooperation and solidarity and serve the interests of the Arab nation."

At the summit, Mubarak criticised the Qatari foreign minister point blank, taking him to task for making offensive remarks about the Egyptian people and the person of the president. "We may differ, but we should not insult each other," Mubarak said. "It is unacceptable that a minister should call a president and his people names."

The surprise summit came after the Saudi monarch had dispatched his State Minister Abdel-Aziz Khweiter to Cairo a day earlier. Mubarak reacted by sending Moussa and chief political adviser Osama El-Baz to Riyadh to make arrangements for the three-way meeting. But Cairo made it a precondition that the Emir of Qatar issue a statement, prepared by the Saudis, prior to the summit "declaring his respect for and appreciation of Egypt's president and people, and expressing his sorrow for what has happened". Mubarak received the statement on the plane heading to Riyadh.

In the statement, the Qatari emir said that he was going to Riyadh "to correct all misunderstandings, and expressing sorrow for all that has passed between the two sister states. We are doing this in accordance with our Arab values and the ethics which bind brothers together." The emir also praised the Saudi mediation initiative.

On his way back home, Mubarak said that the Emir's statement "was not entirely satisfactory, but Egypt accepted it for the sake of the unity of Arab ranks". Cairo responded positively to the Saudi mediation effort in order to preserve Arab solidarity, an objective which Egyptian diplomacy has diligently pursued since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The Cairo-Doha dispute has already delayed a periodic meeting of the Damascus Declaration states which groups together the six Gulf Cooperation Council states as well as Egypt and Syria.

Although Qatar accused Cairo of rallying opposition against MENA IV, it was Saudi Arabia — the largest Gulf state — which first announced a boycott of the gathering following a Mubarak-Fahd summit a few days ahead of the conference. The next day, Egypt, which held that tangible progress must be made in the peace process for the summit to succeed, followed suit and was joined by another Gulf state, the UAE.

As tempers rose, Qatar's bin Jassem said that Egypt was deliberately attempting to sabotage the conference, and accused Cairo of supporting a counter-coup against Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa who deposed his father in 1995. "Our attitude towards [MENA IV] was not aimed at the state of Qatar, and we did not attack them," Mubarak said last week. "All I said was that I cannot go against Egyptian public opinion by attending the conference at a time when the peace process is at a standstill." The president also vehemently denied Cairo's "involvement in any plot against Qatar or its emir".

Earlier this week, Qatar declared that relations with Egypt were now back on track. "Reconciliation has been achieved and relations with Egypt are now back to normal," said Qatari Foreign Ministry spokesman Fawaz Al-Attiyah. According to Mubarak, however, a number of issues continue to plague bilateral ties "as a result of the Qatari [foreign] minister's statements, but they are on their way to being solved".

Uncovering Maya —'royal nurse who fed the body of the god'

Egyptologists are hailing a discovery at Saqqara because, as **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports, it may shed light on the identity of King Tut's mother and father

The boy king's wet-nurse Maya as depicted on one of the reliefs in the tomb

For the past 17 years, French archaeologist Alain Zivie has been excavating at Saqqara. Although he made some remarkable discoveries, none matched the calibre of last week's find.

"I saw the woman breast-feeding a child who had the familiar face of King Tut. It was exciting and moving," Zivie told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. The woman is Maya, the wet-nurse of King Tutankhamun, who came to power at the age of nine and died 10 years later. "It is extremely rare for Ancient Egyptians to devote an entire tomb to a single woman," Zivie said.

The multi-chambered tomb lies at a depth of 20 metres. The reliefs and hieroglyphics on the walls leave no doubt as to the identities of the tomb-owner and the child. One of the reliefs shows the nurse breast-feeding the royal child, who is sitting on her lap. Engraved on the inner wall, the relief bears the inscription: "Royal nurse who fed the body of the god" — an allusion to King Tutankhamun.

Among the findings were two cartouches bearing the names of Tutankhamun and Nebkheprure, the name he took when he was crowned. Also depicted were a number of statesmen, including Tutankhamun's successors such as Ay, who succeeded him for four years, Horemhab, the last of the 18th Dynasty kings, and Ramses I, founder of the 19th Dynasty.

"The historical importance of this tomb and others in the area cannot be over-estimated. It provides valuable information about the rulers of Egypt during a crucial period of its history," Zahi Hawwas, antiquities director for the Giza Plateau, told the *Weekly*.

Parts of the tomb remain covered with heaps of sand and debris. Once removed next season, Zivie hopes that more reliefs will be revealed, shedding light on Tutankhamun's early years as well as the identity of his parents. He also hopes that some funerary equipment may be found inside.

Archaeologists are unanimously enthusiastic, agreeing that when Maya's tomb is completely cleared, "it will tell us something" about Tutankhmun's early years. "He remains a mythical figure, both in life and in his sudden and tragic death," Hawwas said.

Tutankhamun's tomb, with 5,000 priceless items inside, was discovered by British archaeologist Howard Carter in the Valley of the Kings across the Nile from Luxor in 1922. Tutankhamun's father is believed to have been the Pharaoh Akhenaten. As to his mother, "there are all sorts of theories, but she is not known," Zivie said.

This is why the discovery of Maya's tomb is of inestimable importance, said one archaeologist. Another added that "the existence of wet-nurses in Pharaonic Egypt is confirmed for the first time."

Zivie was led to Maya's tomb while he was excavating last year in a huge cemetery of mummified cats, commonly known as *Abwab Al-Qitat*, or the "cats' gate", in Senn El-Gabal area in Saqqara. During the excavation work, he spotted a Tutankhamun relief in an antechamber. When he returned this season, work began in earnest to identify the owner of the tomb.

Culture Minister Farouk Hosni, addressing a news conference on Sunday, described the finding as "one of the most important discoveries related to King Tutankhamun".

"It is a major discovery unearthed by the French and it coincides with the 75th anniversary of the discovery of his [King Tutankhamun's] tomb," Hosni said. "It reinforces the cultural relations between Egypt and France at a time when they are celebrating 200 years of cultural cooperation."

The French ambassador in Cairo said he hoped the discovery would encourage French tourists to flock back to Egypt.

Opposition presses for democratisation

Opposition parties have joined forces with the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and the Communists in a rare show of collaboration to issue a call for political reform. **Fatemah Farag** monitored the debate

On the podium, figures as diverse as Maamoun El-Hodeibi, spokesman for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, and Ibrahim El-Badrawi, representing the Communists, sat side by side and talked of democracy. As if to reflect their different ideological standpoints, they failed to reach agreement on a definition. Yet despite this, they were united in the belief that the minimum common ground exists on which to establish a unified programme of action.

The idea is not new. Hussein Abdel-Razek of the leftist Tagammu Party, which hosted the opening ceremony, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that opposition forces have often acted together since the times of the late President Anwar El-Sadat on issues related to democracy. "This cooperation took many forms: there was the Committee for the Defence of Freedom and the Committee for the Defence of Democracy. We have issued joint statements and, after the 1995 parliamentary elections, representatives of the five major parties and two major trends got together and decided to systematise our cooperation."

The result was a Coordination Committee which has met regularly and prepared joint statements on issues such as the local council elections. However, not all previous attempts at cooperation have been successful. In 1994, the Professional Syndicates Coordination Committee attempted the initiative of bringing syndicates, political parties and selected public figures together in an attempt to formulate a Charter of National Reconciliation. The initiative failed because the representatives of the Brotherhood and the Islamist-oriented Labour Party refused to sign the final document. "There were differences regarding the paragraph on women and also the fact that they wanted to stress that all laws should be based on Islamic *Shari'a* while we wanted to stress that all religions should be respected," Abdel-Razek said.

From Monday's opening statements it was obvious that some of the differences still remain. Labour leader Ibrahim Shukri once again stressed the importance of *Shari'a*. However, Hodiebi tried to gloss over these disagreements, saying he accepted the position of Tagammu leader Khaled Mohieddin sanctioning the right of all political groups to legal representation in return for respect of all religions. Abdel-Razek believes that this time, they will be able to circumvent the problems of the past.

Following the opening ceremony, two days of sessions held at the headquarters of the participating political parties covered issues ranging from student freedoms to the effects of liberalisation on political party activities. Yesterday, a programme of action was due to be approved.

Because of the timing of the conference, terrorism inevitably emerged as a key issue. At a meeting between political party leaders and Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri last week, it was announced that all the different political forces involved stood firm behind the government in its battle against terrorism. So what about democracy?

Abdel-Razek said that political parties must take a strong stand against terrorism in order to deny the government this pretext for holding on to such authoritarian measures as the emergency law. Yet everyone, including Abdel-Razek, is quick to add that the limited scope of present democratic arrangements together with unemployment and poverty are factors that encourage terrorism. So should full democracy come before the end of terrorism, or should it be the other way round? This paradox does not seem to have received a very clear answer.

No'man Gomaa, representative of the liberal Wafd Party, posed a crucial question: why should the government give in to any of the opposition's demands as long as the government is in a position of power? "The prime minister told us that political reform will come after we get beyond the bottle-neck of economic reform... Do we have to wait that long for the approval of a simple request like removing the names of dead people from the voting lists? Such a petty request is still at the top of our political agenda. How is that possible?" lamented Goma'a.

The connection between economic and political reform thus became, in turn, another key problem to be addressed. Abdel-Razek, who chaired the session, pointed out that economic liberalisation has not brought about political liberalisation and that is a lesson which can be learned from the history of many countries of the world.

"We cannot expect to do everything at once," explained Abdel-Razek. "The programme that we will sign will be a step forward and we will try to disseminate its ideas as widely as possible and then choose key issues, such as the law governing civil action or the emergency law, and try to create a pressure bloc to bring about change."

Another issue was the negligeable grassroots following these political parties have, which may be seen as undermining the usefulness of the conference and of any consensus that is reached at it. As Hodeibi pointed out, "we are sitting in here while the man on the street knows nothing about us." Goma'a put most of the blame on the apathy of the average Egyptian citizen, while others pointed to the government as the main culprit through its monopolisation of the media and its "discouraging" of the activities of political parties.

Finally, there is a subject which remains largely taboo — that of the internal democracy of these political parties. Although Abdel-Razek made reference from the podium to the lack of democratic structures within many of the parties which are calling for democracy, he later told the *Weekly* that this was an issue which could only be broached in the most general terms. "We cannot tell people what to do within their parties," he said.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Al-Ahram

Redrawing the regional map?

Old alliances and animosities were still alive, but new political realities seemed to be emerging at a foreign ministers' conference of Islamic states in Tehran. **Dina Ezzat** reports from the Iranian capital



A general view of the opening session of the 8th Islamic Conference summit in Tehran on Tuesday *(photo: Reuters)*

A ministerial gathering of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) is usually a talking shop where delegates hold forth in very general terms on the problems facing the Islamic world. However, the eighth session of the OIC foreign ministers' meeting that was held in Tehran this week was an exception. This usually low-key event witnessed the emergence of several new political trends, as well as the fragmentation of some of the old tendencies.

The general impression was that host nation Iran was trying hard to find a way out of the regional political isolation to which it has been condemned ever since the Islamic revolution erupted there in 1979.

The Iranians discussed bilateral relations with a number of countries with whom they currently have problems, particularly Iraq and Egypt, as well as countries, like Saudi Arabia, with which they traditionally compete for regional influence.

They were also talking about establishing a new security order in the Gulf region where the United States has been enjoying undisputed military dominance since the 1991 war to liberate Kuwait.

According to one Iranian delegate, the fact *that the OIC conference* was held in the Islamic Republic of Iran is one of "the most im*portant events to take place in Iran since the* revolution".

Iranian officials do not like to go on record as saying that the OIC meeting gave them the opportunity, *slowly but surely*, to re-integrate the political map of the Middle East. Yet, they were quite happy to speak of their "pleasure" at working side-by-side with delegates from the Muslim countries of the Middle East.

The Iranians also wished to use the meeting as a forum to highlight the "liberal" policies of the new Iranian President Seyed Mohammad Khatami, in the hope that Iranian foreign policy may come to seem more acceptable to the secular and semi-secular governments of the region.

To show good will towards their Arab neighbours, the Iranians supported a resolution on "a code of conduct" opposing terrorism. The resolution uses quite strong language to condemn militant attacks against civilians and tourists. "It is very significant that the Iranians decided to support this res*olution," said an Egyptian diplomat who* wished to remain anonymous.

In one of the many signs of a rapprochement between Iraq and Iran, Iraqi Foreign Minister *Mohamed Said El-Sahaf held a meeting with* his Iranian counterpart Mohamed Kamal Kharazi.

Following the meeting, El-Sahaf said that "Iran is one of the most important Islamic states" and Kharazi expressed sympathy with the "suffering of the Iraqi people" under the sanctions imposed on Baghdad since 1991.

Kharazi also held a meeting with his Kuwaiti counterpart, Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, to discuss broad outlines for potential military cooperation, in which the Iranians wish to include all the Gulf states. "It is perfectly legitimate for Iran to want to enter into military pacts with the Gulf states so as to ensure that the current US hegemony over the region will not last forever," said one senior Iraqi delegate who asked for his name to be withheld. However, he added that it was not Kuwait that Iran should be wooing. "It is Iraq and Syria; these are the right partners for a pact to get the US out of the region. The Kuwaitis have too many vested interests with the US to go into a pact with the Iranians".

Not much progress was made in this connection, but the idea is still afloat.

However another military alliance, between Turkey and Israel, did attract the unanimous *opposition of all the other OIC nations*. A resolution, drafted by Syria and presented to the plenary in the name of the Arab group, did not mention Turkey by name. But it expressed opposition to *all* types of military cooperation with Israel in view of the current stalemate in the peace process.

Another resolution, also opposing Turkish policies without mentioning names, declared support for the territorial integrity of Iraq. Originally, the draft condemned the Turkish military operations in northern Iraq, but for diplomatic purposes the name of Turkey was later removed.

In the view of Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, the Arabs have strategic reasons to reject a military pact between Turkey and Israel and have every reason to support Iraq's territorial integrity, but it is not in their interest to "fall into the trap of wrecking their relations with Turkey". Moussa added: "Turkey is an important country in the Middle East — this is something that I will never tire of saying — and we should not allow the parties who are *trying to harm relations between us and Turkey* to get away with it."

Meanwhile, Turkey had a tough time with the Arab states when it presented a resolution *explicitly accusing Syria of supporting* terrorism. Eventually, Turkey had no choice but to drop the resolution.

"There is no doubt that the Turks felt the heat *in* a very tough session. Turkey is not used to this at the OIC," said a top Arab diplomat. However, he added, "We did not let them feel completely trapped, because we do not want to lose them to the other side."

Many diplomats felt it was unusual to see such relatively close cooperation between all members of the Arab group. "It is very interesting to note that all the Arab states, without exception, supported the resolution on the territorial integrity of Iraq," said Moussa.

Indeed, the resolution even gained support from Kuwait, which is still wary of Baghdad's intentions. Asked whether Iraq and Kuwait had aired their differences in the plenary, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Al-Sabah responded: "We don't have agreements and we don't have disagreements. That is all I can say."

Land grabbing, de jure and de facto

The US is reportedly getting impatient with Binyamin Netanyahu. But even if the Israeli premier "bows" to Washington's will on redeployment, writes **Khaled Amayreh** from Jerusalem, he is likely to make the issue moot by directly grabbing most of the West Bank's territory

Ever since his ostensibly fruitless meeting with US Secretary of State *Madeleine Albright* in Paris last week, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has been holding intensive discussions with his *ministers* and close advisors on how to respond to American demands concerning the extent of the next Israeli army *redeployment* in the West Bank.

According to well-informed Israeli and American sources, Albright, contrary to her amicable public posture vis-à-vis Netanyahu, expressed growing exasperation and *disenchantment* with his "equivocation and procrastination." On Tuesday, the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* quoted "reliable *American sources*" as saying that Albright had expected Netanyahu to come up with "definite percentage points" *concerning* the size of West Bank territory earmarked to be included in the second phase of redeployment.

Furthermore, *Ma'ariv* reported that Albright informed Netanyahu that the United States would publicly blame Israel for the present deadlock in the peace process if Netanyahu failed to come up with a "reasonable *redeployment formula*."

On Monday, *The New York Times* reported that US *President Bill Clinton's* administration would make public its disenchantment with the Israeli prime minister if his planned *meeting* with Albright on 17 December ended in failure.

Nevertheless, there is *more* that worries Netanyahu and his three extremist ideological stalwarts (Danny Naveh, Shai *Bazak and David Bar-Illan)* than the reported American insistence on a minimum of 10 per cent of the West Bank to be vacated by Israel. *According to Israeli sources*, the American administration also accepted the Palestinian view that there should also be a third *phase of redeployment* either before or concomitant with the final status talks, as stipulated in the 1993 Oslo Accords, and *later in the Hebron* Agreement signed by Netanyahu himself nearly a year ago.

Clearly, it is this third crucial third phase of redeployment which Netanyahu and company dread most, because if and when implemented, Israel would have to pull out of the entire West Bank minus Jewish settlements and military positions. The latter, along with East Jerusalem and such issues as water sources and borders, are to be resolved in the final status talks.

Having failed to sell his equivocal ideas to Albright and the European leaders he had met with during his recent visit to Europe, Netanyahu is facing a sort of dilemma. If he does not budge before the American demands for a sizable and "credible" redeployment within the West Bank, he would risk the disintegration of his fragile coalition. If he does, he risks a *serious* rift with Washington.

On Monday, Foreign Minister David Levy warned that there were certain Israeli officials (alluding to the Bazak-Navey-Bar Ilan trio) who were advocating a policy *of equivocation and procrastination until* the next meeting between Netanyahu and Albright. He said such a policy was *short-sighted, harmful and would lead to Israel's isolation.* The Israeli press quoted him as saying that "problems ought to be tackled not evaded." *Levy's discordant remarks drew* angry reactions from Navey who accused Levy and others of the same ilk of "compromising *Israel's* security and vital interests." He said that it was unacceptable for Israel "to act under pressure from anybody," including the United States.

However, Netanyahu will have to take a decision, sooner rather than later. Some observers argue that it is unlikely that he will openly defy the United States and fly in the face of Albright. Nonetheless, he might embark on a series of drastic unilateral steps that would, in essence, undo the Oslo Agreement. These "balancing" steps would presumably include a frantic campaign of settlement building throughout area "C" accompanied with the expansion of existing settlements; and also unilaterally redefining the concept of "military positions" to include large areas of the West Bank's hilly regions, including the Hebron hilltops, the Jordan Valley, the outlying plateau south of Bethlehem (known in Hebrew as Gush Etsion) and the settlement of Ma'ali Adomin east of Jerusalem.

In short, the bulk of the West Bank would be *annexed* de facto to Israel, thus in effect nullifying the third phase of *redeployment and irreversibly predetermining* the shape of the final settlement.

Netanyahu would *probably* embark on this scenario for two reasons. First, to mollify and appease his coalition *partners in case* Palestinians accept the "historical offer," and second, to blame and outmanoeuvre the Palestinians if *they did not*, accusing them of ruining the prospects of peace by insisting on receiving "everything or nothing".

More to the point, even if Netanyahu agreed to go ahead with the second redeployment phase without insisting on scrapping the third phase, he would adamantly insist on making a definite linkage between the latter (the third stage) and the final settlement.

In fact, Netanyahu endorsed last week a "final status map" jointly prepared by the former Defence Minister Ariel Sharon and the current one Yitzhak Mordechai which detailed areas of the West Bank to be retained by Israel in the final settlement.

War drums in Washington

The recent confrontation between Washington and Baghdad is less tense. But the war drums continue to be heard as **Thomas Gorguissian** reports from Washington

Neither American nor Iraqi officials traded tough announcements this week shortly after the United Nations Security Council approved unanimously the extension of the oil-for-food deal for a third period of *six* months. The deal allows Iraq to sell $2 billion worth of oil, under strict UN supervision, in or*der to buy food and medicine* for its impoverished popula*tion who have been suffering* tough economic sanctions for *the past seven years.*

US ambassador to the UN Security Council, *Bill Richardson*, said that Washington "fully supports" *the oil-for-*food programme. Yet he warned Baghdad of "playing politics" with the deal or using it for purposes not accepted by the UN. Baghdad initially said it would not accept the oil-for-food deal until some changes were made to the UN-supervised distribution system of goods and the mechanisms of approving contracts between Iraq and other countries. But Baghdad, as usual, reversed its position two days later and has said it now accepted the deal.

Contrary to the relative calm in the 'war of words' between Washington and Baghdad, other voices calling for tough action against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein continued to be heard in influential US circles.

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote an article in the *Washington Times* on Sunday titled "No carrots *for Saddam*." During the last two weeks, both sticks and *carrots were mentioned* several times during discussions on Iraq. *Republicans and the* influential pro-Israel lobby were, of course, *in favour of* the stick. They criticised what they described as the administration's weakness in facing Saddam and called upon Washington to "teach Saddam a lesson." Members of the same lobby also rejected the administration's tactic of blaming Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu for the split in the anti-Saddam coalition. The coalition formed after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 has fragmented recently because of Netanyahu's hard-line policies in the Middle East peace process. They said this approach was "wrong and dangerous."

Kissinger, in his article, warned Washington against "any modification of the inspection system or easing sanctions" because such an approach "undermines the long-term ability of the United States to protect the Gulf." He added that the "United States should, therefore, reverse the Geneva 'compromise', by which the [UN *weapons] inspectors returned* to Baghdad in exchange for a *diplomatic process to review* the composition of the in*spection teams and an easing* of the food-for-oil sanction." In addition to the backtracking, the former secretary *of state advised Washington* to "prepare for military action to assure the exact and full compliance with inspection procedures. These should be designed to deprive Saddam of the chief elements of his military structure."

Although the military option was never ruled out by US President Bill Clinton and Pentagon officials, it remains unclear what the US would actually target in any expected military strike. But the consensus in Washington is that if a military strike was approved, the strike must not be "pinpricks." A sample of recent op-ed titles which appeared in top US newspapers were: "Target Saddam Hussein" by Robert Satloff, executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in *The Washington Post*; "If We Can Kill Saddam, We Should," by George Stephanopoulos in *Newsweek*; "Overthrow Him," by Zalmay Khalilzad and Palu Wolfwitz *in the Weekly Standard.*

Furthermore, as part of the *anti-Saddam campaign*, NBC television network aired an *"exclusive story" on Monday*, quoting a Pentagon report on how *the US was grossly and* naively vulnerable to attacks by biological weapons. There was nothing new in the story, except for talking explicitly about a possible attack here in America. And who would be the party willing to attack the US with biological weapons? Make no guesses, it is Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. The same NBC report mentioned that the Pentagon was ready to spend up to $1 billion to face such a threat.

Arguing against the "dump Saddam" tide, former Ambassador Roscoe S. Suddarth, president of the Washington-based Middle East Institute, took exception. In an article which also appeared in *The Washington Post* on Tuesday, Ambassador Suddarth sounded a rare note of reason in defining the US attitude towards the situation in the oil-rich Gulf region. In an article titled "Let's Not Panic about Saddam Hussein," he wondered why the US should "*panic advocating a major political and military campaign that is not only unnecessary*, but that could set back rather *than enhance US interests in* the area?"

In Washington, the administration seems to be worried about what would happen after a possible military strike and what Saddam's reaction would be. Nobody really seems to know, or at least is willing to discuss, what the future of Iraq would look like in the event of Saddam's downfall.

A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report which was handed to Congress in June and released only last week noted that the Iraqi leader remains "in control." But the same report did not exclude "the possibility of a sudden and violent change of the regime in Iraq."

According to some US analysts, the timing of releasing the CIA report and its contents might give some valuable pointers on how US decision-makers were thinking at present and the hesitant stance they displayed in dealing with Iraq. Yet, despite such confusion, there seems to be two *points of consensus:* first, that the current Iraqi re*gime cannot be accepted*, and, second, that none of the cur*rent Iraqi opposition groups* or figures were reliable or strong enough *to replace* Saddam.

Thus, Washington is in stand-by status. One factor which might determine future US action will be the report which Richard Butler, chief UN weapons inspector, is expected to release after his visit to Baghdad which started Tuesday. Butler was sharply criticised by Iraqi officials who refer to him, like his predecessor Ralph Ekeus, as "a puppet in the hands of the US."

An Israeli dilemma: withdraw or kill civilians

Fighting continued in south Lebanon for a second week, claiming the lives of 20 Lebanese civilians and threatening to plunge the area into a new cycle of violence. **Zeina Khodr** reports from Beirut

As violence continued in south Lebanon for a second week, Israeli army officers, for the first time, are debating the effectiveness of maintaining the occupation zone in south Lebanon. The debate, which has been simmering for some time within Israeli political circles and among the public, comes amid mounting Israeli casualties in the *conflict.*

Lebanon responded to a flurry of recent Israeli *statements suggesting* a unilateral withdrawal by dismissing any conditional deals. "Lebanon will *not sign any document granting* Israel security guarantees in the event of a unilateral pullback. This is a trap and we *will* not *fall in it*." *Lebanese* Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri told reporters earlier this week. "Lebanon and Syria *have* a *united* stance and Israel has no choice but to withdraw from the south and the Golan simultaneously."

Hariri's comments were made only days after former Israeli Labour Minister Yossi Beilin claimed that there was a nine-point plan of action which would allow the Israeli army to withdraw from south Lebanon in six months in compliance with UN Resolution 425 without necessarily reaching a political deal with the Lebanese government.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Fares Boueiz downplayed Beilin's statements, saying he was in no position to take decisions. "Beilin is not in a position to express an official stance which we could take seriously," Boueiz said.

Israeli *military* indecision over what action it should take in south Lebanon was expressed when *Major General Amiram Levine, head of Israel's* northern command, admitted that senior officers *under his command are split in the debate over* south Lebanon. "Some favour a unilateral withdrawal on the basis that the occupation zone is no longer justified in security [illegible]. But there are others who think [illegible] should be improving the [illegible] capabilities of the soldiers." [illegible] said. Levine himself, opposes a unilateral pullout on the alleged grounds that this would not secure Israel's northern borders.

The head of the Israeli-allied militia *in south Lebanon*, Antoine Lahd, also joined the debate on withdrawal. "I *have convinced* the Israeli government to accept a withdrawal in the framework of a plan which would guarantee security on the border. Beirut will be held responsible for security following the deployment of the Lebanese army in the south." Lahd said.

As a further sign of growing uncertainty in Israel, Internal Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani has reiterated his suggestion that Israel should bomb "strategic targets" around Beirut after every resistance attack against Israeli troops in the south. "Each time one of our soldiers is killed, we should attack targets such as public utilities — electricity installations and water distribution networks — in the Beirut region," he said. "This would coerce the Lebanese government to emerge from its in*difference and send its forces to tame Hizbullah.*"

Kahalani's warnings were not new, but they were *made only hours after five Israeli soldiers* were wounded in a roadside bomb attack carried out by Hizbullah fighters early this week. Lebanese observers downplayed Kahalani's threats, saying that his views on Israel's policy in Lebanon were highly inconsequential within Israel.

A Lebanese government source told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the options at Israel's disposal for dealing with Lebanon were not without limita[illegible]. "It cannot just bomb the country's infra[illegible]. Washington and other major powers [illegible] this to happen. *The US administration* has made it clear that it wants all parties to *comply* with the *terms of the cease-fire*," *he said.* The cease-fire has been in effect since April 1996 *after Israel* carried out a *major* offensive against south Lebanon, code-named Grapes of Wrath.

Since the renewed wave of violence began in south Lebanon two weeks ago, civilians have been the main victims. Three Lebanese civilians were killed early this week outside Israel's self-proclaimed "security zone" when mines planted by Israel exploded. Nine others were killed last week in mortar shelling on the occupied village of Beit Leif. The shelling occurred during an exchange of fire between Israeli troops and members of the Shi'ite Amal Movement. Israel blamed Amal for the attack, but the group, which has recently stepped up its operations *in* the south, *de*nied the charge.

"*We were not near the village. Israel is the* party responsible for this massacre. The areas we were *shelling were far from Beit Leif*," one Amal official told the *Weekly*.

The Lebanese government said it was investigating the Beit Leif shelling, while sources in the UN peacekeeping force in the south said that the mortar barrage came from the Lebanese resistance troops.

There are growing fears that Israel will apply new methods in the south following its claims that resistance guerrillas were *launching most of their* attacks from civilian areas. This runs contrary to the terms of the *April (cease-fire) Understanding* which bans attacks against and from civilian areas, but sanctions resistance operations against occupation forces.

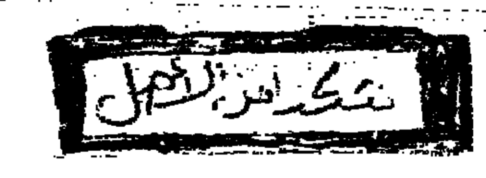
"When the resistance were firing from open areas, we had the ability to fire back on them... and hit a few of their mortars. Accordingly, they began moving into southern villages," Colonel Reuven Benkler, the head of Israel's artillery in the south told foreign journalists.

Hizbullah also accused Israel of breaching the April truce. "Israel's *repeated* shelling of *south* Lebanon from civilian areas in northern Israel is a violation of the under*standing*," *said Sheikh Nabil* Kawook, Hizbullah's commander in south Lebanon. "*We will counter* them with rocket strikes into the Galilee if they continue," he added.

In a recent editorial, the Lebanese English-language newspaper, *Daily Star*, said that the Is*raeli* government appears to have two options to prevent military losses in the south. The first is a unilateral withdrawal to the border, a move which would make the resistance victorious, but would put an end to Israel's casualties in what Lebanese Foreign Minister Boueiz described as "Israel's Vietnam." The second option would be to follow the recommendations of Israeli *hard-line army* commanders such as Levine, and conduct a more offensive war against the *resistance*. "This would involve increasing the number of commando raids *north of the* occupation zone, deploying more helicopter gunships and intensifying artillery barrages. Such measures would boost the morale of Israeli soldiers and would not be opposed by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's critics," the paper said.

It is precisely this uncertainty within Israel's hard-line government and army that will continue to make the south a volatile and precarious area for some time to come.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**





As Palestinians mark the 10th anniversary of the Intifada, 9 December, a haunting question overshadows the occasion: was Oslo the Intifada's victory, or its defeat? **Graham Usher**, tracing the vestiges of the uprising, found heroic memories outweighed by present frustration and ambivalence



A typical scene during the eight-year long Palestinian uprising or Intifada. Palestinian children showed the whole world how stones could resist heavily-armed Israeli occupation troops (photo: *Khaled Zighari*)

Human rights — a lasting weapon

Raji Sourani is the director of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), one of the most highly respected non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the Occupied Territories.

In an interview with **Graham Usher**, Sourani assesses the role of the Palestinian human rights NGOs during the Intifada and currently in the self-rule areas under Palestinian Authority (PA) control. He also looks ahead to the PCHR's International Conference on the final status issues to be held in Gaza on 12 December.

During the Intifada, Palestinian human rights NGOs played a very prominent political role. Why was this?

I think there were two reasons. First, by the time the Intifada started, over 400,000 Palestinians had been in prison and hundreds had been deported. People had seen their homes destroyed and their land confiscated. All of these acts by the occupying forces led to the emergence of a human rights culture among Palestinians, an awareness of the importance of human rights.

Second, the human rights NGOs didn't work in isolation. We were part of the Palestinian community. At the same time, we worked to professional standards, which meant our information was sound and could be used by political groups inside and outside the Occupied Territories.

Looking back, do you think the presence of Palestinian human rights NGOs to some extent inhibited Israel's actions during the Intifada?

I certainly think Israel became sensitised to the work of the human rights organisations. We were professional organisations, politically independent, with international credibility due to our wide networks outside the Occupied Territories.

This was important because the human rights community throughout the world is a very close community. Through its communication networks, our data was made available to diplomats and embassies, who became aware of what was going on in the Occupied Territories. Also, the media recognised the importance of our work, the Israeli as well as the international media, and came to use our organisations as independent and reliable sources of information.

I would not say the Palestinian human rights NGOs improved the situation of Palestinian human rights under occupation. But I would say that we prevented a deterioration of the situation, especially during the Intifada. To take one example among many: before we took it up, nobody really took notice of Israel's use of undercover units in the Occupied Territories. Once we exposed them, neither Israel nor the world could deny that undercover actions were an integral part of the occupation. The same is true of torture in Israeli prisons and of Israel's illegal use of administrative detention among Palestinians.

Some Palestinian observers argue that, as the Intifada subsided, the Palestinian NGOs became professionalised and lost their close connection to the community. Do you accept this critique?

No. I think what happened was more complicated than that. With the signing of the Oslo Accords, a totally new political era opened. In the past — for all our sacrifices and professionalism — we were pursuing a simple agenda, which was to expose the human rights abuses of the occupation. With Oslo, we suddenly had the fact of a Palestinian Authority on Palestinian soil.

This means for us that the rule of the PA as well as the occupation has to be part of the human rights agenda. There is no longer one but two agendas — our work vis-à-vis the occupation and our work vis-à-vis the PA.

We consider the PA to be a national authority, as an extension of the PLO, however limited its powers may be. It is no secret that the human rights NGOs have had problems with the PA. But I consider the real problem to be political. As a lawyer, I cannot accept that between 150-200 Palestinians have been imprisoned by the PA for almost 20 months without due process.

I do not believe this state of affairs is the will of the PA. It is due to Israeli and US pressure. These prisoners are mostly supporters of Hamas and Islamic Jihad and are victims of the external pressure imposed on the PA. The same is true of the PA's decision in September to close down 20 Hamas-affiliated institutions and NGOs. These institutions are legal bodies, licensed by the PA, which serve over 40,000 people.

When Mrs Albright or whoever demands that the PA close such institutions, she is attacking Palestinian civil society. This is not to excuse the PA action. But it is to insist that Israel and the US are actively encouraging the PA to violate Palestinians' human rights and ignore the rule of law.

What is the purpose of your conference on 12 December?

The resolution of the final status issues is what will bring peace to this region. As a human rights organisation, the PCHR believes peace cannot be achieved without honouring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. These rights are enshrined in international law which neither the PLO nor Israel nor the international community can revoke — whether we are talking about Jerusalem, settlements, sovereignty, borders or water.

Because of this fact, we decided to invite neutral international experts to discuss the final status issues from the point of view of international law. You see, the question of Palestine was not settled with the Oslo Accords. For Palestinians, the occupation will remain unless and until the final status issues are legally and justly resolved.

The fruits of the Intifada

What remains of the spirit of the uprising that brought together all the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza throughout six long years?

At a small rally to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Intifada, the Palestinian Authority's (PA) communications minister, Imad Falougi, asked the question, "Did the Intifada achieve anything?" Neither Falougi nor his audience could answer the question. It was their silence that made the occasion so poignant.

So did the location. The rally was held in Jabalyia, the largest refugee camp in the Occupied Territories, with around 70,000 Palestinians crammed into a living area of less than one and a half square kilometres. It was in Jabalyia — on 8 December 1987 — that an Israeli truck rammed into a Palestinian taxi, killing seven workers and sparking mass protests that spread throughout Gaza and then to the West Bank.

It was Jabalyia too that mourned the first martyr of the uprising, a seventeen-year-old called Hatem El-Sesi, shot dead by the Israeli army on 9 December as he attended the funerals of the seven workers. He was the first of 1,465 Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank who gave their lives in a national uprising that was to rage for the next six years. The fire ignited in Jabalyia was only dowsed when Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo Accords, on the lawn of the White House, on 13 September 1993.

Did that signature, by which Israel belatedly recognised the PLO, mark the Intifada's victory or its defeat?

It is a question even leaders of the Intifada have difficulty in answering. In 1987, Jamal Zaqout was a 30-year-old from Gaza's Shati refugee camp and a leader of the PLO's Democratic Front faction. Together with three Palestinians from the other main PLO factions, he drafted the first leaflet of the uprising, calling on Palestinians to maintain their protest until they achieved their goals of freedom and independence. Deported by the Israelis in February 1988, he returned to Gaza in 1994 as part of the Oslo agreements. He is now a director-general in the PA's Ministry of Civil Affairs.

For Zaqout, the Intifada was neither a victory nor a defeat. "It was an instrument and a message that peace will only come with Israel's withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state," he says. The task now is to mobilise the popular and democratic resources released by the uprising on the new terrain created by the Oslo agreements. He accepts this will be no easy task.

"People believed peace would deliver everything," he says. "There was little understanding that the peace process was a continuation of the struggle that began with the Intifada. Our main strength now as then is the people, but today the struggle is not only to resist occupation, but also to build a democratic Palestinian society".

If Zaqout is ambivalent about the legacy of the Intifada, Ghazi Hamad sees only failure. In 1987, he was a 23-year-old Islamist from Gaza who became a founder member of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas. Arrested in 1989, he spent five years in Israeli prisons. He has also been arrested five times since 1994 by the PA. He is at present editor-in-chief of the Islamist weekly newspaper, *Al-Risala*.

For Hamad, the Intifada was "the most important event in the history of the Palestinian people", uniting all Palestinians around the two goals of ending the occupation and establishing a state "at least" in the West Bank and Gaza. For seven years, Israel was unable to crush this movement, he says. But "then Arafat came along and signed Oslo. At a stroke, he solved for Israel the problem of the Intifada, and for the PLO the problem of its diplomatic isolation. But the real problems that had caused the Intifada — of Jerusalem, prisoners, settlements, refugees, sovereignty — these he did not solve".

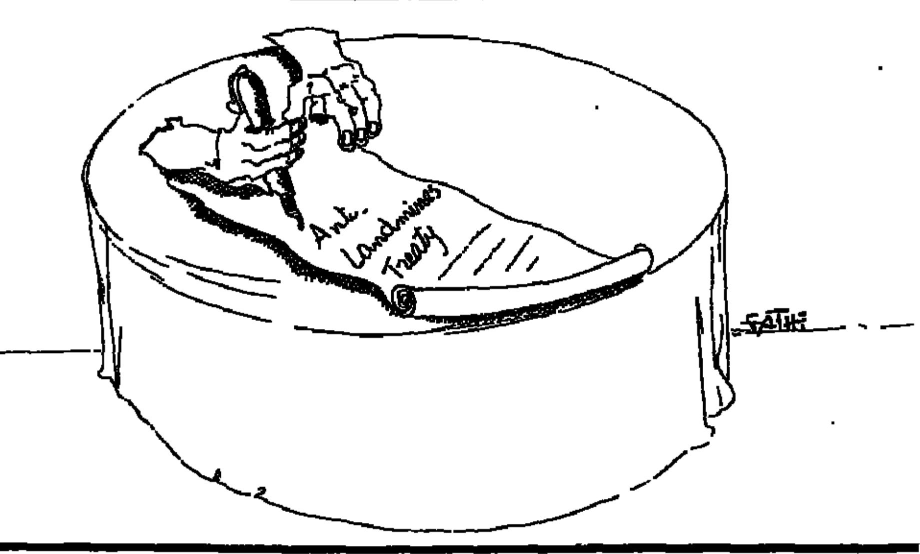
Yet, like Zaqout, Hamad believes that the fact of a PA in the West Bank and Gaza has changed the nature of the struggle, even for Hamas. The "space for military struggle is narrowing", he admits. "I believe Hamas now has to focus on more political issues, such as building Palestinian civil society and defending people against the human rights abuses of the PA. It is difficult — I would say impossible — for Hamas to stand against both Israel and the PA. It doesn't have the power to do so".

Could the Intifada be renewed? Zaqout is sure it can. If the Israeli government continues in its refusal to implement the agreements, then "the Palestinians will again defend their rights," he says. But "there will be no model. As in the [original] Intifada, the Palestinians will find new forms of struggle to achieve their rights."

Hamad is less certain. If he feels "sorrow" at the passing of the Intifada's tenth anniversary, it is because the national unity expressed in the uprising has now vanished from Palestinian society. "Any new Intifada will take a long time to build," he says. "The establishment of the PA has created new classes and new contradictions. There are the new rich of the PLO returnees, there are those who joined the PA's security forces and there is the mass of people who are without jobs". The result is that "the people mistrust the Authority and, to be honest, they sometimes mistrust the opposition".

But, he adds, "sooner or later, they will demand to know where the PA is taking them and will ask: Where are the fruits of the Intifada?"

How great a victory?



Though the US, Russia and China stayed out, the *signing of an international treaty banning landmines* was declared a victory. But de-mining remains a daunting *task*, and for some, a *lucrative business*, writes **Jooneed Khan** from Ottawa

Some 120 countries met in Ottawa last week to sign a comprehensive ban on anti-personnel landmines (APLs) amid pronouncements of a 'victory for humanity', which were accompanied by a scramble by the private sector to corner the potentially lucrative market for de-mining.

Many experts have criticised governments who re*fused to sign the treaty, claiming that the military* importance of APLs is now obsolete. In an open letter to US President Bill Clinton in April 1996, prominent US military figures like General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of Operation Desert Storm, and General David Jones, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, urged that APLs be banned.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Canada's Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy emphasised the 'humanitarian' nature of the campaign against APLs. Jody Williams, coordinator for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which *won the 1997 Nobel Prize for* Peace, went further: "here we have 120 governments recognising that together we are a superpower, not one *but everybody*," she said.

The rhetoric perhaps intended to minimise the fact that the three military superpowers, the US, Russia and China, were not among the signatories. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke of "a historic coalition of conscience" which "shamed the world and enlightened it." NGOs, capitalising on the outpouring of support, even launched a parallel campaign to collect individual *signatures for a so-called "Peoples' Treaty"*.

But more ominously, the rhetoric of the conference sought to project the alignment of major national and international NGOs with governments on this highly emotional issue as a new working model. This comes at a time when governments around the world are increasingly attempting to undermine civil societies in most fields and when NGOs are by definition expected to act as counterweights to governments.

Axworthy spoke of a "defining moment when a full partnership between states and NGOs, working inside and outside existing international bodies, can produce results that neither can achieve alone".

"What I am talking about," the Canadian foreign minister declared, "is a full working partnership between governments and civil groups. Since October 1996, the two have worked in tandem — NGOs mobilising public opinion and governments mobilising political will; what has become known as the Ottawa Process is symbolic of *a profound and lasting change in the conduct of inter*national relations."

As for the competitive rush from the private sector to peddle new de-mining technologies, the figures speak for themselves. More than 100 million landmines are buried in fields and alongside the roads and footpaths of some 60 countries, including one third of the developing world. It is estimated that they kill, maim or mutilate about 30 people every day, four out of every five vic*tims are civilians, mostly labourers and children. Some* 100 million landmines are further stockpiled in warehouses, and 10 million landmines continue to be pro*duced annually. For every mine cleared*, 20 more are being laid. The average cost of a landmine varies between \$3 and \$30, and the cost to clear a landmine can be between \$300 and \$1,000.

Much as the market for landmines has been profitable in a world driven more by conflict than by peace, the parallel shift to de-mining also involves big money.

Karl F inderfurth, the newly appointed US special representative for Global Humanitarian De-mining, attended the conference as an observer, saying the US supports the Treaty's goals even though it was not sign*ing it. He said the US spends \$80 million annually* on removing mines around the world and plans to increase that amount to more than \$100 million next year.

Canadian officials said contributions and pledges from countries attending the Ottawa conference for de-mining and aiding victims could surpass \$500 million. Just clearing the 100 million mines in the field will take decades at a cost of around \$30 billion.

The race for contracts by competing firms is on, even though the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel *Mines and on their Destruction is not expected to come* into effect for at least another two years and needs a minimum of 40 countries to ratify it. Canada did so in November, becoming the first country to ratify the treaty.

But as Axworthy said, "the ban convention will be meaningless unless we implement it." He enumerated the challenges ahead as "the universalisation and entry into force of the treaty, the destruction of stockpiles, the clearing of mined areas, and the care, rehabilitation and reintegration of mine victims — redeveloping countries *paralysed by the silent killers in the ground*."

"After the convention enters into force," explained Axworthy, "we have four years to destroy the stockpiles and 10 years to clear mined areas which must be surveyed, marked, monitored, mapped and fenced off. The true humanitarian challenge is to ensure that mine victims get immediate medical assistance and help in reintegrating into their societies."

De-mining the Cold War battlefields such as Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique, Nicaragua or post-Cold War ones as Iraq and the former Yugoslavia will be a long and arduous process. Bringing the US, Russia and China on board may be harder, even though all three have announced moratoriums on APL export.

US President Bill Clinton has called on the Pentagon to replace APLs in Korea by 2006 and everywhere else by 2003. *But US officials said this ban would not apply* to three categories of APLs called 'Gator', 'Volcano' and 'MOPMs', which they described simply as 'explosive devices'. *The US* walked out of the talks on the APLs Ban Treaty after failing to have these three landmines redefined as 'submunitions', 'antitank mines' or 'smart mines'. Yet all three categories figure on the Pentagon's list of APLs banned from export since 1992.

In their April 1996 open letter, US military figures stated that APLs "cause casualties among innocent people, especially farmers and children." It follows however, that if this is the criteria by which to ban explosive devices, cluster bombs, which top the alternatives to landmines and of which more than 34 million were *dropped on Iraq during the Gulf War, should also be* looked into for potential banning. In 1997, the US will have spent at least \$1.3 billion in research, to test and produce new cluster weapons and their launching systems, writes the Mennonite Central Committee, a major campaigner in the APLs ban.

Clinton supports a global effort to eliminate all 100 million existing APLs by 2010 but says the US prefers to arrive at such a result through ongoing disarmament talks.

China, which also had an observer delegation in Ottawa, *alongside the US and Russia*, announced that "the general principle of solving the landmine problem should take balanced account of both humanitarian concerns and legitimate military needs of sovereign states for self-defence."

Russia, with a vast border to defend, says one reason it is not signing the APL Ban Treaty is because it does not have the money to conduct massive mine removal operations under the four year deadline suggested by the conference organisers.

In the meantime however, the global movement mobilised against *APLs* can be expected to push for more bans. "If landmines can be banned, after biological and chemical weapons, why not all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons? The next goal is to outlaw nuclear weapons, which constitute the greatest threat to the future of humanity," writes the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation on the Web.

Axworthy may find it more difficult then to be on the *side of the angels. While he was basking in the glory of* the signing conference in Ottawa, *The New York Times* was already handing him a very unkind cut by splashing a report on Canada's export of its dangerous Candu nuclear technology.

Memories of Leningrad

Russia's manoeuvring to increase its influence in the Middle East is *more than mere* politics. **Abdel-Malek Khalil** hears how for one key political figure, the blockade of Iraq evokes memories of the tragic *siege* of Leningrad

Returning from a visit to the Middle East, Russian Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov recently held a press conference in Moscow where he assessed *the political situation* in the region and spoke of his party's desire to establish closer ties with the Arab world. As the leader of a party *which* controls the Lower House of Parliament, Zyuganov represents a powerful voting bloc, which certainly influences and sometimes determines the course of Russia's foreign policy.

What was the purpose of your trip to the Middle East?

Last spring I visited Syria, Lebanon *and Cyprus and met with the presidents* and parliamentarians of those countries. I saw cities that had been de*stroyed — virtual ghost towns, where* arbitrary lines separate peoples, and I was convinced that such policies not only damage the countries concerned, but are also a disservice to international relations.

The leadership of our party has therefore decided to intensify their efforts in the Middle East in the light of the aggravated crisis in the Gulf area in particular, and the Middle East as a whole. *Our national interest in this can be re*duced to one simple need: we want to have friendly states to the south, which is Russia's underbelly — stretching from Kashmir and Afghanistan, through Iran, Iraq and Kurdistan and as far as Gibraltar.

This time I met with the leaders of Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. I intend all such meetings to serve the same goal: the achievement of peaceful and democratic *resolution of conflicts. In addi*tion, [Russian diplomatic efforts] are seeking to strengthen our position in the region.

Our faction, together with the Popular Patriotic Union, have worked very hard in the Duma [Lower House] to pass a resolution demanding that the *blockade against Iraq be lifted. And the* resolution was passed almost unanimously, with the only dissenting votes coming from the Yabloko faction. [The sanctions against Iraq] have blockaded an entire people and they particularly affect women, children, the aged and the sick.

Even so, I can tell you that the Iraqi state is fulfilling its obligations to [provide food rations] to every family. It may be very little, but every person is given something so that she or he can survive. I know this, because *I* was able to see the situation on the ground.

Do you expect Iraq to repay its debts to Russia if sanctions are lifted?

The Russian government *and financial* institutions have decided either to write *these debts* off or to restructure them. If we look at countries like Iraq, Egypt and Syria, we can see that they have vast agricultural resources *and abundant mineral* reserves in oil and gas.

So, if we can develop normal relations with those countries, they will be able to repay their debts, and this will be to the *benefit of both sides.*

[As for the continuing blockade], Iraq has fulfilled its obligations and continues to do so consistently. *If we look at the* text of the relevant documents, there is little fault that can be found. At the level of the Security Council, it is very important that the Russian Federation, China, India and France start working on mechanisms to gradually lift the blockade.

Frankly, I was amazed that the Americans do not even want to lift the air blockade. To reach Baghdad, one has to drive 1,000km from Amman *along* a road which I call the "path of pain".

Imagine how many gravely ill people cannot leave the country when they need treatment. It is amazingly immoral. It is a *scandal*.

How about the facilities which remain *inaccessible to international* inspectors. Can you be sure that no banned activities are being conducted there?

I have full confidence that this is so. You see, I consulted with all specialists who have taken part in monitoring and who have studied these facilities. We also *have a competent, intelligent and* experienced ambassador working in Baghdad.

In addition, specialists at *all levels* have already been there, including specialists on missile technologies and on chemical and bacteriological weapons.

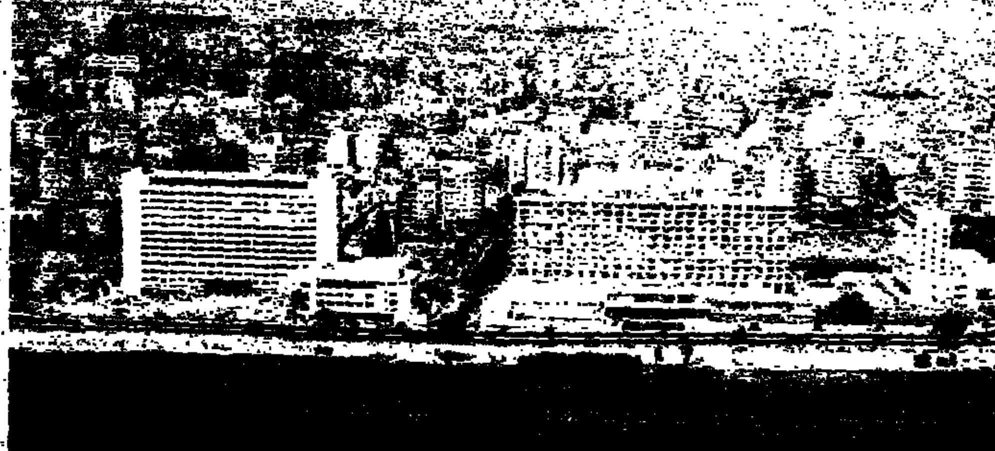
It is just that the Special Commission [responsible for inspection] is finding new tricks all the time in order to perpetuate the blockade. Whole nations should not be subjected to enforced isolation of this kind. We Russians remember only too well the 900 days and nights of the siege of Leningrad.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**



Bad time to sell?

Will investors shy away from the government's plans to privatise tourism assets after the Luxor attack? **Niveen Wahish** investigates




Two of around thirty hotels scheduled for sale

photos: Emil Karam and Emad Abdel-Hadi

Come 17 December, the Holding Company for Tourism, Housing and Cinema (HCTHC) is scheduled to announce the sale of several major tourism assets, including hotels, restaurants and land for tourism projects.

But the decision, which was taken by the government during the Euromoney Conference in September, is being questioned by some parliamentarians who believe that the death of 58 tourists in a Luxor terrorist attack just weeks ago will drive away potential investors.

If it doesn't, say critics of this long-awaited decision, then the sales will likely be undervalued.

"No investor will be willing to invest millions [in a project] that doesn't guarantee a profit," Salah El-Tarouty, head of the People's Assembly's Cultural Committee, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "This is not the right time to sell."

Officials and experts, however, disagree, arguing that the 17 November militant attack on tourists in a Luxor temple, will affect this tourist season, but will have a negligible impact on tourism investments, as a whole.

"[Investment] opportunities are not affected by occasional incidents," Mohamed Bakier, sector manager for privatisation in the HCTHC said.

Under the proposed tourism privatisation plan, nearly 60 tourism assets, valued at between LE5 billion and LE8 billion, will be sold off in several groups. Each of these groups will include an "asset" such as a hotel or restaurant and a plot of land.

The method of sale has yet to be agreed upon, but could be to an anchor investor, several investors or through public subscription.

While each group will consist of various assets, one group — including the famed and historic Marriott, Mena House, Cataract, Winter Palace and Palestine hotels — will stand out from the rest. Only 40 per cent of the shares of this group will be floated on the stock market, while the rest will remain with the holding company.

The government decided to adopt this approach with the historic hotels to appease a general public who feared that potential buyers might demolish or misuse them. The historic hotels' group was to include also the Manial Palace Hotel. But fears that either the HCTHC or a potential buyer could damage the palace's priceless botanical gardens prompted the government to place the palace under the control of the Culture Ministry.

Another point of contention over the sale of tourism assets, and especially historic assets, was the evaluation process. Again, the public feared that the government may sell these assets at low prices.

But according to Mohamed Eweiss, tourism sector transactions manager with Arthur Andersen, the consultancy firm, funded by the United States Agency for International Development to provide the government with advice on privatisation.

The government has adopted the cost-approach evaluation system, said Eweiss. This method evaluates the current state of the assets, without regard for whether it generates income or not.

Five local engineering firms were responsible for the evaluation, and their findings were passed on to an evaluation committee which then passed on its recommendations to the public sector minister. The findings were then passed on to the Ministerial Privatisation Committee, which issues a final decision.

While evaluating the hotels on a cost-approach basis, the value of the land had to be taken into account as well. And, contrary to what skeptics predicted, the value of the hotels is not underestimated, said Eweiss.

During the first phase of the evaluation, the engineering firms included the value of the land surrounding the property in the price of the hotel.

"They did not take into account the plot on which the hotel is built because the building itself is not going to be demolished," explained Eweiss.

With this initial evaluation made, it is passed on to the government with the recommendation that it be used as a base price to be offered to investors.

"I strongly recommending that the committee value is placed as a floor value and from there the government sees if anyone is willing to offer a higher price," he said.

The asset groups involving plots of land and non-functioning hotels are expected to be sold to anchor investors. Other assets, such as hotels currently in business, will be subject to public floatations of shares ranging from five to 10 per cent of their total value.

"The rest of the shares should go to an anchor investor or to a group of experienced targeted investors," said Eweiss, indicating that the hotel management companies are the best option.

The Luxor attack may have an impact, said Eweiss, but only on inexperienced investors.

"If the authorities succeed in erasing the effects of this incident, as an investor I will certainly not be affected," he said.

"We have always witnessed such incidents, but the industry has always picked up," added Eweiss.

International investors in Egypt agree.

Alexander Solleiro, managing director of Accor Hotels in Egypt, said that this incident will not damage the expectations that his company has for the Egyptian tourist industry.

"We will continue to look forward to investing in this sector," he said, adding that, ultimately, the determining factor is to see what measures the government will take to prevent similar incidents in the future.

Industry disappointed with tourism salvage decrees

A package of cabinet decrees aimed at boosting Egypt's tourism industry and help soften the impact of a recent terrorist attack in Luxor has businessmen in the industry grumbling that it is too little, too late. **Sherine Nasr** reports

With the death of 58 tourists during a November terrorist attack in Luxor essentially shattering hopes of another lucrative tourist season, the government last week issued a number of decrees aimed at protecting investments in the industry and attracting visitors to the country.

The cabinet's decisions urged banks to offer tourism project investors a three-month debt-servicing grace period, and ordered a dramatic slashing in entry fees and a 50 per cent reduction in the price of domestic flights.

Sound good? It should, but businessmen, already feeling the crunch brought on by the Luxor attack, say that the decrees are not enough to prevent them from sustaining huge losses.

"The three-month grace period is hardly sufficient," said Amir Fahmi, the owner of a tourist company. "We are still going to have to pay the banks sooner or later... and now that there is hardly any income [since the attack], how can we ever get enough money to carry on with our projects."

Fahmi, along with other businessmen, are calling on the government to extend this grace period to one year at simple interest.

Egyptian banks finance about 50 per cent of the country's new tourism ventures — valued at about LE40 billion in total — rendering them indispensable in promoting new projects.

"The tourism sector will not be able to survive unless it gets full support from the banks," said Alaa Hafez, a board member of the Egyptian Tourism Chamber.

The Luxor attack, which left a total of 68 people dead (including the six militants) and was the largest since Islamist militants began their violent, five-year campaign to topple Egypt's secular government, prompted mass cancellations by foreign visitors and tour companies, severely threatening the future of Egypt's $3 billion a year tourism industry — a national mainstay.

It also forced the national carrier, EgyptAir, to significantly reduce the number of its international flights — especially to Asia, and left hotel and tourist sector enterprise owners often with little choice but to lay off some of their employees to cover their basic monthly operation costs.

Among the provisions of the cabinet decree is that tourism sector employers do not lay off workers. But, according to some businessmen, some hotels and tour companies in Luxor, Aswan and the Red Sea resort areas are not complying.

"The decision to keep the staff on is not binding," said Mohamed Leheta, the owner of a tour company. "How can a tourist village with 300 employees and LE100,000 per month in salaries manage without tourists?"

There will have to be some layoffs for the business to stay afloat, he said.

Compliance, according to businessmen, seems to be the biggest problem with these decrees. In much the same way that some hotels are still laying off workers, some banks are feigning ignorance and not offering debtors the mandated grace period, let alone an extended one.

"Some banks claim that they have not been [officially] notified," said Fahmi, adding that for these decisions to be effective they must be set forth in the form of legislation.

The same problem applies with regard to the 50 to 75 per cent reductions in docking fees for tourist and passenger ships, which were also mandated by the decree. Some of the Egyptian port authorities have also said that they haven't been informed that they are required to comply with the decision, said Fahmi.

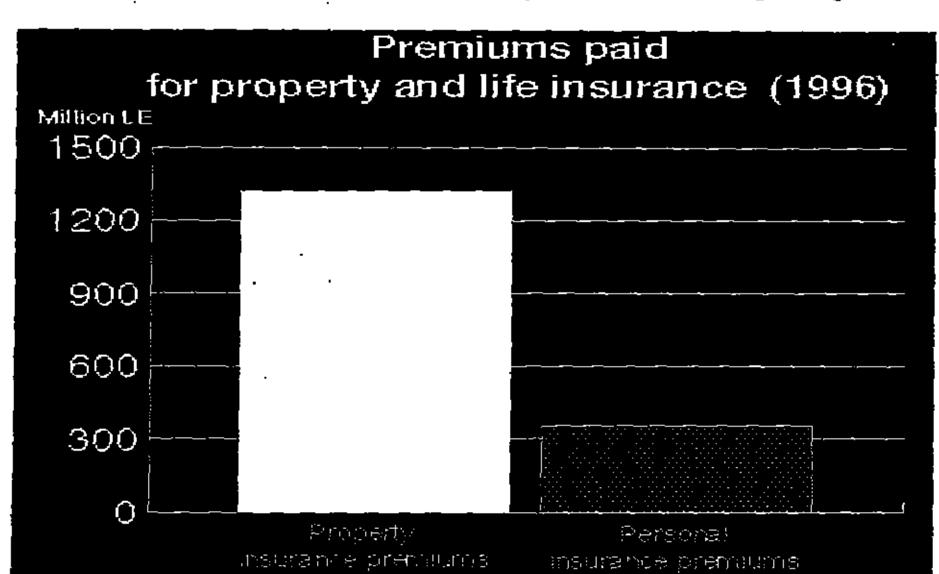
Cabinet decrees are theoretically binding, but there are loopholes under which employers can lawfully fire workers employed without contract, for example.

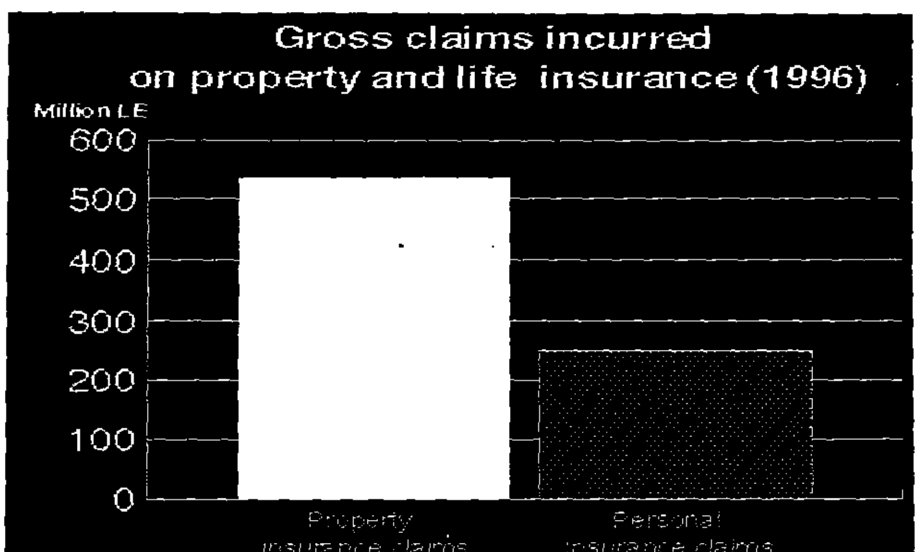
"These decisions cannot be fully implemented unless they take the form of binding laws," said Magdi El-Hennawi, another Egyptian Tourism Chamber board member.

While the decrees, say businessmen and tourism experts, are well intended, simply offering incentives is not likely to be enough. EgyptAir's chairman, Mohamed Rayan, in a speech before parliament last week, told the MPs that there have been roughly 90,000 cancellations in the three-week period since the Luxor attack was carried out. EgyptAir flights from some countries such as Japan have witnessed cancellations of up to 90 per cent.

The only thing that is likely to bring the tourists back, say some businessmen and tourism experts, is increased security.

"Tourists are not likely to come unless they feel safe," said El-Hennawi.





Insurance industry due for an overhaul

Inefficient and inconsiderate: insurance companies are the same the world over. In Egypt, they are set to be privatised, ready or not. ***Aziza Sami*** *reports*

Once renowned for having provided the Arab countries with the necessary expertise to build their own insurance industries, Egypt's insurance companies, in the words of one of their own leaders, have become "obscure to all but those who work in them."

With those words, Borham Atallah, a former chairman of Al-Sharq Insurance, essentially summed up the Egyptian public's opinion of this sector, dominated by three government-owned companies.

These companies are now next on the government's list for privatisation, as they are not up to the challenge of playing their role in a rapidly emerging and increasingly liberal market place, according to experts.

In a recent meeting with the heads of major insurance companies, held at the American Chamber of Commerce, Economy Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali said that the insurance industry will be responsible for supporting the country's financial sector, which is now stronger than before.

Given the volatility of other sources such as workers' remittances, insurance companies must be able to generate a national savings rate of 22 per cent to support a 7.8 per cent GDP growth rate, Ghali said.

In Egypt, life insurance premiums currently account for no more than 0.2 per cent of GDP, compared to 30 per cent in developed economies. Similarly, few people in Egypt voluntarily take out insurance, leaving the number of policy holders at a staggeringly meagre 60,000 out of a population of over 60 million.

While these figures are due, in part, to a low level of public awareness, it is also a product of the fact that the Egyptian insurance sector does not offer the variety of services found on the international market. Some of the services yet to be provided are credit insurance and stock and share portfolio insurance.

Another reason for the sector's poor performance is that it has not been run with the profit motive in mind, dominated instead by a bureaucratic mind set.

While Egyptian citizens and businesses may have had it with this sector, so too has the government. "Changes must be made in the framework that covers [insurance] companies," said Economy Minister Ghali.

Reform initiatives have been under way for years, beginning with legislative reforms in 1981. More reforms are currently being carried out within the framework of liberalisation in accordance with the GATT trade agreement. Foreign investors, as well as the World Trade Organisation, are pressing in particular to remove the 49 per cent foreign ownership ceiling currently in place.

But a lack of legislative amendments, coupled with too much red-tape and inefficiency in the companies themselves, meant that these reforms did little to rectify the standing of the insurance companies.

The industry has already witnessed a partial privatisation in the late 1970s, through the formation of three semi-public, joint venture insurance companies — the Delta Insurance Company, the Suez Canal Insurance Company and El-Mohandes Insurance Company. In all these companies, the public sector held on to majority shares.

In 1994, further privatisations took place with the establishment of two local private insurance companies — Pharaonic Insurance and Allied Investors. Then, at the beginning of 1997, foreign investors came onto the Egyptian insurance scene for the first time, setting up the joint venture American Life Insurance (Alico), the country's first private life insurance firm.

Despite these changes, the situation looks bleak.

"In a country with Egypt's per capita income, premiums should total 4.5 per cent of the GDP," Ghali told Egyptian insurance executives in the recent meeting. "Companies must be run according to international principles and manage risk in all economic ventures."

"Attaching a cost and premium to the risk is the job of the insurance industry," he said, and this "has not happened".

"As long as the industry is covering the large, obvious risks, but not the specific ones associated with the... emerging economy and the capital market, it is not doing what it should," he added.

But as in other privatisation initiatives, the government plans to nudge the insurance sector into the realm of the private sector slowly.

"We are opening up more to privatisation, but we will not push matters [too fast]," said Khairy Selim, deputy director of the Egyptian Insurance Supervisory Authority — the industry's regulatory body. "Any further liberalisation will be decided by the general state of the economy."

Prices in all existing branches of insurance have already been liberalised, except for insurance on cars and fires. According to Selim, these too will be liberalised by the year 2000.

Insurance industry insiders, fearing the onslaught of competition, have predictably voiced concerns.

"The industry must enjoy a three-year transitional period in order to prepare for what will be very fierce competition," said Mounir Ghabbour, chairman of Pharaonic Insurance.

"We must be given the opportunity to raise the standard of the company staff, increase life insurance premiums and be allowed by law to form new insurance firms with a minimum capital of LE1 million," he said.

Ghabbour's list of demands did not end there. Other measures, such as the introduction of new computerised services, focusing on risk management and developing consumer awareness about insurance, are needed to build a national insurance industry, he said.

"We need to develop a host of new services related to changes in the economy, so that we can compete with the foreigners when they come," Ghabbour noted.

His statements are well-timed. The government plans to announce next week further plans to reform the sector by the end of the year.

Costing US-Egypt free trade

A debate over the idea of a free trade agreement between Egypt and the US prompted some very real arguments between economists in a recent seminar. **Sherine Abdel-Razek** attended

Economists rarely agree on anything, as recently underlined in a seminar held by the Egyptian Centre for Economic Studies (ECES).

The issue up for debate was the conclusion of a free trade agreement between Egypt and the US.

While proponents of the agreement view it as a means of boosting foreign direct investments (FDI) in Egypt and balancing the trade deficit between the two countries, critics maintain that those who would pay dearest for it would be Egyptian labourers and that it would actually increase the trade deficit.

Ahmed Galal, executive director of the ECES, told participants in the seminar that the agreement, if concluded, would narrow the $2.25 billion trade deficit and leave the US market open to Egyptian goods. US exports to Egypt total $3 billion, while Egyptian exports to the US amount to only $775 million.

The agreement would also increase the volume of foreign direct investments, thereby giving the economy a boost. While Galal did not offer an estimate of how much the investment figure would increase, he said that in Mexico — which, along with Canada, was signatory to the North American Free Trade Agreement with the US — the level of FDI from the US doubled in a seven-year period.

Along with NAFTA, the US has signed a free trade agreement with one other country — Israel.

Should Egypt join this list of trade agreement signatories with the US, FTA proponents said Cairo would see tariff and non-tariff obstacles removed, allowing unrestricted entry to its products.

Robert Lawrence, a Harvard University professor of economics attending the seminar, explained that the agreement would benefit both countries, but that it could take time to conclude.

Should this agreement be signed, it would, for example, do away completely with quotas on Egyptian textiles. While these quotas are set to be lifted by the year 2005, they would still face high tariffs. A trade agreement, said Lawrence, would do away with these barriers.

The US would also stand to benefit from the agreement, Lawrence told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. With Egypt and the European Union currently working on signing a partnership agreement, US manufacturers stand to lose a sizeable market share in Egypt. If the agreement is signed, by the year 2010 Egypt will allow in European products without tariffs. The loss in trade for the US would be about 10 per cent of the current volume of exports, or $300 million.

"One reason for the US to go ahead with an agreement with Egypt is to get a reciprocal benefit by having the tariffs on its products also removed," he said.

But standing in the way of concluding the agreement are several hurdles, the first of which is President Bill Clinton's failure to secure Fast Track Authority from Congress. The Fast Track Authority would give Clinton the right to negotiate trade agreements with foreign countries without Congressional approval. Congress, just weeks ago, defeated a proposal to reduce US aid to Egypt.

Other agreements being negotiated by the US could also result in a delay in the signing of a trade agreement with Egypt, said Lawrence. The US is currently negotiating free trade agreements with a number of countries, including Chile.

Galal Amin, an economics professor at the American University in Cairo, also sees several stumbling blocks in the way of concluding an agreement. He is, moreover, fundamentally wary about signing such an agreement with the US.

Topping Amin's list of concerns is that the plan for the agreement has not yet been negotiated and, as a result, there is no way to really assess the consequences.

Besides, the agreement would not necessarily balance the trade deficit between Egypt and the US, said Amin. His reasoning: Under such an agreement, Egyptian exports would increase by only $200 million over 1996 figures. The US, on the other hand, would enjoy an $800 million increase — meaning that the trade deficit would increase to $3.5 billion, rather than decrease from its current level of $2.25 billion.

Egyptian workers would also have to pay a dear price for the agreement, as most Egyptian industries that would be forced to compete with the US are labour intensive industries.

In the event of increasing US foreign direct investments to Egypt, Amin argued that it could result in a sharp decline in foreign aid.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Towards a new consensus

Developing the role of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference has become imperative, writes Ibrahim Nafie

The backdrop to the eighth Summit of the *Organisation of the Islamic Conference*, held in Tehran, includes deadlock in the Middle East peace process, the continuing *ramifications of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait* and the on-going international blockade of Iraq, the US economic blockade of *a number of the Conference's members, as* well as various political disputes between member states.

Conflicting items on the agenda suggested a sharp disparity in opinion over a number of issues the conference was due to *discuss*. Turkey, *for example, submitted* a proposal condemning Syria for fostering terrorism and supporting the Kurdistan Labour Party. *Syria countered by submitting* a proposal condemning Turkey for its military cooperation with Israel. Turkey also came under fire from Iraq which has submitted a proposal to safeguard the security and unity of Islamic nations and their territories and to condemn Turkey for violating Iraqi territory.

The administrative and religious supervision of Jerusalem and the progress of the peace process also emerged as a bone of contention, notably between Jordan and Palestine.

Most of the items on the agenda concern either national or bilateral issues. That so few items on the agenda address general or collective issues indicates that the preparatory sessions were insufficiently focussed on issues that might have strengthened the OIC. This is no small matter in light of major changes in the international order which have systematically marginalised developing countries. In this context the primary task before the summit, and other third world organisations, should be *to attain a general consensus among* members that observes national and regional interests and rights.

Yet the fact that the summit is being held in Tehran leads to a certain optimism. The Iranian leadership appeared keen to use the occasion to support the moderate trend inside Iran, as represented by Iranian President Mohammad Khatimi, and to effectively end nearly two decades of isolation. And in seeking to ensure the highest possible attendance of Islamic nations Iran strove to create a positive at*mosphere in the preparatory sessions and* appeared keen to project itself as an impartial sponsor rather than becoming embroiled in any of the contentious issues before the summit.

Tehran's recent condemnation of terrorism, a first step in this direction, will hopefully be followed by others. Perhaps soon we might see Iranian initiatives to end its conflict with Iraq, to resort to international arbitration in its dispute with the UAE over the islands it has occupied in the Gulf and to take other measures to generate mutual trust between itself and its neighbours.

The energetic Egyptian input to preparatory sessions aimed at containing disputes over proposals concerning normalisation with Israel and Turkish-Israeli military cooperation. Egypt was also keen to affirm the importance of enhancing the efficacy of the OIC as a whole, contributing half a million dollars towards the organisation's coffers, currently $15 million in the red. Egypt also urged a thorough re*vision of the organisation's structure*.

The 142 resolution proposals on the summit's agenda are an impressive sign of activity. However, the need to formulate some form of consensus over controversial issues remains imperative, and it is Egypt's opinion that the summit should confine itself to issues pertaining to the Islamic nation. And among the most pressing is the need to contend with changes in the new global order, changes which compel themselves forcefully through economic markets, the media and modern communications technology.

It is vital *for the summit* to stress values inherent in Islamic-Arabic culture. True Islamic-Arabic culture is characterised by a large degree of *respect for religious* freedoms, human rights and civil liberties. It rejects all forms of terrorism, which in turn compels us to unify our *efforts toward* combatting causes of sectarian strife and the tendencies of some religious groups towards using violence as *a means to effect* political change. The only way to rectify the image of Islam abroad is to identify those factors that mar its image *while* reaffirming the true and original values of Islamic-Arab culture.

The summit should also *focus on ways of* enhancing the performance of the Conference and to promote cooperation and unity among its members. *It should resolve to* convene a summit annually, instead of every three years, so as to be able to address problems before *they get out of* hand. Towards this end, the summit should formulate a set of common standards for all *its members*. Foremost among these is that mutual relations among its members should be based on a balance of interests rather than a balance of power. It should also set as one of its objectives the establishment of an Islamic court of arbitration for the peaceful resolution of disputes.

As a final note, the Tehran summit, in spite of the considerable challenges before it, will only constitute an important step towards greater cooperation and coordination between members if its resolutions are followed through, particularly those resolutions concerning the condemnation *of* terrorism and its dissociation from Islam.

Global warming

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed *discusses the issues raised at last week's Kyoto conference on global warming, an additional challenge to humankind on the eve of the third millennium*

The *year 1997 has* been *the warmest ever since* temperatures were recorded over a century ago, lending credence to the global warming theory and raising fears that it can be a potential threat to the survival of the human species in a world where the negative effects of contemporary technology could eventually outweigh its benefits. To face the challenge, delegates from more than 165 countries came together in Kyoto for an international global warming conference during the first ten days of December.

According to available statistics, 1995 saw a rise in carbon dioxide emissions, the most im*portant of the so-called greenhouse gases*, of 1.7 per cent in Europe and 3.4 per cent in the United States, and, from 1990 to 1995, of 8 per cent in Japan. In the largest developing countries, the figures are staggering: from 1990 to 1995, a 20 per cent increase for Brazil, 30 per cent for India and China and 40 per cent for Indonesia. The fires that recently devastated Indonesia and whose effects were felt throughout southeast Asia are an indication of the growing ecological threat.

Coal and petroleum remain the two main sources of energy in our time. Both are heavy producers of the environmental pollutant, car*bon dioxide. If present trends continue, the* International Energy Commission estimates that the consumption of energy derived from fossil fuel will increase by 30 per cent over the next fifteen years. The ensuing rise in the planet's temperatures will not only attest to Man's ability to bring about meteorological changes no less effectively than nature itself; it will unleash a man-made New Climatic Order with no precedent since the planet came into existence.

Scientists expect the temperature of the biosphere to rise more in the next 100 years than it has over the last 10,000 years! Temperatures are expected to rise by up to 2.2 degrees centigrade by the year 2100, destabilising ecosystems and compromising man's ability to adapt to his environment. As the icecaps melt, ocean and sea levels will rise and submerge substantial tracts of land in many countries, notably in Africa, where the coastlines of Senegal, Cameroon, Gabon and Angola are expected to be severely eroded. The Nile Delta itself is said to be under threat. In the Middle East, deserts *will expand despite an expected increase in* rainfall, because the increase will be offset by a higher rate of evaporation due to warming. The countries most likely to suffer are the poor over-populated countries, while those expected to draw some benefit from global warming are the countries closest to the North and south poles, where the climate will become milder.

Actually, the problem is not only ecological, but also economic and political and closely linked to the question of subjecting development to ecological constraints. Curtailing development rates or adopting cleaner technologies is a luxury available to developed countries only which, unlike developing countries, are under no pressure to catch up with *anyone. Moreover, the cost of non-polluting* technologies is still prohibitive. It is true that pollution is increasing at a much higher rate in non-developed countries than it is in developed countries, but because non-developed countries begin from a much lower level, the main culprit when it comes to overall pollution is still the developed West. It has been calculated that an American citizen consumes ten to twenty times as much energy as his Chinese or Indian counterpart. A topic of wide debate at the Kyoto conference was whether developing countries should be wholly exempted from all ecological constraints in order not to impede their development.

But the central topic of debate at the conference was among the developed countries themselves. The Anglo-Saxon world with the notable exception of Britain, that is, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, opted for a plan to stabilise greenhouse emissions at 1990 levels by 2010, while Europe, supported by the non-governmental environmental groups and developing countries, *opted* for a 15 per cent decrease of the emissions by the same target date. Britain's defection from the fold can be put down to *its new prime minister*, Tony Blair, who, as an ardent partisan of Green ideology, sided with Europe in the debate.

Japan, the host country, proposed a compromise solution, namely, a 5 per cent reduction of greenhouse emissions by 2020. It also offered to make its experience in non-polluting technologies available to developing countries at reduced prices. With these proposals, Japan is asserting its status as a great power adapted to the requirements of the twenty-first century and deserving of a permanent seat in the Security Council.

*Indeed, the very meaning of power in inter*national politics is changing with the introduction of the ecological factor. Power is no longer determined exclusively in terms of military superiority but also in terms of ensuring ecological survival. Until recently, the ecological challenge was limited to ensuring bio-diversity, the key issue at the 1992 Rio Summit. Today, the challenge is compounded by the global warming factor. Ecology has become an ingredient no less important than science, technology, politics and economics in shaping the future of the human species.

Coffee club

By Naguib Mahfouz

For me, the café is the place where I used to meet my closest friends. Later, as a writer, the café became a place to meet other writers and in*tellectuals. But I* also go to the café to be alone, to watch passersby and meditate. The café is where I smoke the water-pipe, an activity which would be unthinkable at home but which could take up the whole day at the café. *At certain times*, of course, all four of these companions were present at once.

I have been a regular at different cafés. As a young schoolboy, I would accompany my father to Al-Club Al-Masri. My father normally indulged in conversation with his friends, after ordering me a piece of Turkish delight or an ice *cream*.

When in secondary school, I started frequenting cafés with my friends. We would have a hard time deciding between Kashtamer and the café just opposite it, Isis, of which no trace remains today. We even dared to go to the Ahmed Orabi Café, known for its high-society clientele. But soon, we *moved to Al-Hussein, to* Al-Fishawi. After that, we went to the café now called after me. It had been built on the site of a ruined monument. After my Nobel award, it was transformed by an architect and became the elegant place we know today.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Unity defended

Al-Akhbar: "The stances Egypt has taken are crystal clear and in line with Arab solidarity. This is clearly shown in its stance on the Iraqi crisis and its rejection of any military action against it, in its upholding of a peaceful solution to the problem of south Sudan and its rejection of a partition; in its *stance on the Middle East problem and safeguarding* Palestinian rights, as well as in its position on the economic siege of Libya. And the reconciliation summit in Riyadh crowns Egypt's efforts to promote a unified Arab stance."
(Editorial, 5 December)

Al-Ahram: "Netanyahu has succeeded in wasting a lot of time after coming to power. He was finally forced to sign the Hebron agreement which upholds the Oslo Accords, but has refused *to implement many* aspects of the Hebron agreement and refused to carry out other agreements which Israel signed and the US was witness to. There is, therefore, no point in dealing with an Israeli premier who does not implement what was agreed to. Once again we demand of the Palestinian leadership a firm stance towards such misconduct, and President Assad's dictum that there should be no talks unless Israel meets its commitments fully should be upheld. Above all else, we call for complete political coordination between the Palestinian leadership and the Arab sides relevant to the crisis. Without all this, valuable time will be lost and Netanyahu will emerge the victor."
(Ihsan Bakr, 7 December)

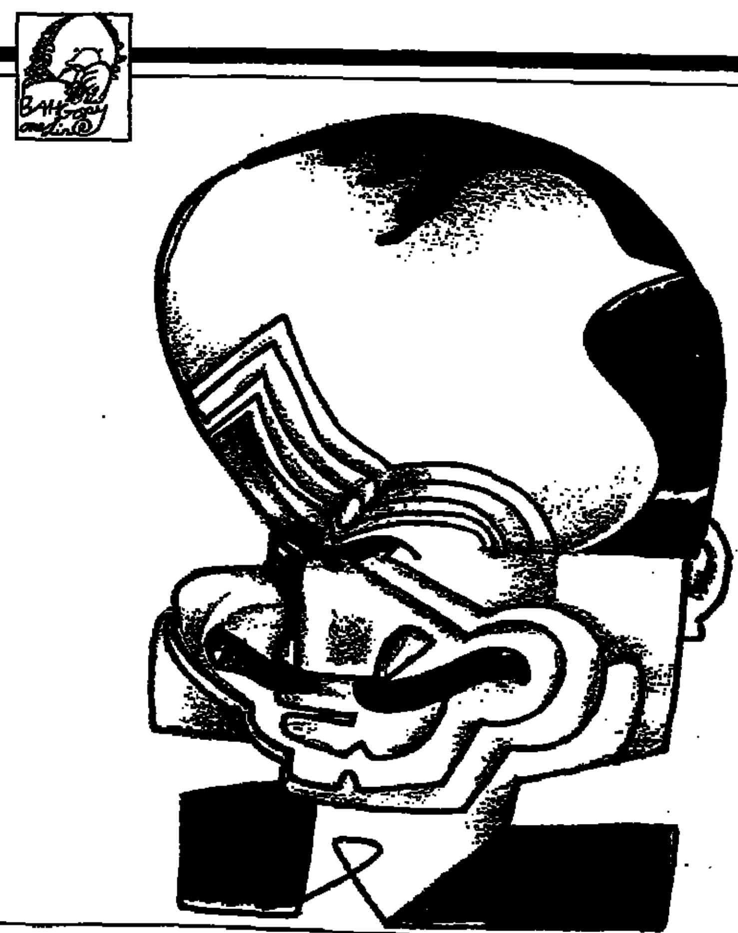
Al-Gomhuria: "There can be no doubt that there are many in the West who oppose the getting together of Islamic states to attend the Islamic summit in Tehran, and the proof of this is the torrent of criticism from the US and Israel of the event. The critics asked: How can those who are negotiating with Israel agree to meet in the capital of a country which rejects peace with Israel?"
(Samir Ragab, 8 December)

October: "There are those in the Arab world who fall into the trap of internecine fighting which has been laid for them. There are some who *think that* to show courage means to widen the divisions in Arab ranks and to promote relations with foreign countries. Some think that foreign protection is safer than that emanating from Arab brothers. But the day will soon come when these will be disappointed by their for*eign protectors* and come *to* realise that they have fallen into a trap which has but one goal: laying hands on Arab wealth, dissipating Arab power, aborting Arab dreams and killing off the Arab future. I hope that those who have been deluded will wake up in time and listen to the pleas made by Mubarak and Zayed and other Arab leaders."
(Editorial, 7 December)

Al-Arabi: "In their recent meeting with the prime minister, representatives of the legal parties asked for political reform which would resuscitate party life, but the reply was that such reform had been postponed until after economic reforms had been completed. This is a statement that cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. There can be no economic reform without political reforms which would allow each citizen to participate in decisions affecting the future of the country and choose appropriate economic and social policies. The recent Luxor massacre has exposed security and political shortcomings, and this once again calls for a radical change in all aspects of our society. Equating the concept of stability with no change has led to a state of stagnation which can no longer be tolerated."
(Galal Aref, 8 December)

Rose El-Youssef: "The decision of the government not to hold a dialogue with the terrorist groups should be applauded. A dialogue is something between two schools of thought and two sets of opinions. We have never heard of an outlaw organisation *which commits* crimes like murder and theft, defames religion, takes food away from the poor and undermines the economic infrastructure and then seeks a dialogue. *And worse*, an organisation that sets conditions for such talks! They set conditions in the way Israel does. But we know who is behind Israel's arrogance of power. *Who, we wonder, is behind these* terrorist organisations? Is it a power which stands against any national voice being raised and seeks to destroy any national action?"
(Abdalla Imam, 8 December)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



The *new* interior minister, Habib El-Adli, posed quite a challenge to my pen: how does one express both change and continuity, the new face of security and the need to confront on-going problems? I chose to portray him as a collection *of* contradictions, of which the most important divides the upper, cerebral part of the face from the lower section, in which all Habib El-Adli's features are concentrated. The large dome made up by the head and forehead *reflects* the need for constant, rapid thought, while the series of sharp lines which furrow the brow indicate the conundrums facing the *new* minister. The jaw is square, set firm in determination, while the upward curves of line and *moustache squeeze upward*, almost obscuring small, penetrating eyes. The minister, to me, appears here as a man both defiant and harrowed as he approaches his new and difficult tasks.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Balm for old wounds

The eighth summit meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which opened in Tehran on Tuesday, was a good chance for leaders of 55 Muslim countries to remember that strength lies in unity. That was indeed the spirit prevailing at the three-day meeting, attended by more than 30 heads of state and prime ministers — an unprecedented show of solidarity. President Mohammad Khatami foiled expectations of conflit, and skillfully managed to create a spirit of understanding among participants. Iran, known for its support of radical Islamic groups and a mighty regional force in the oil-rich Gulf region, has even agreed to a resolution condemning all acts of terrorism carried out in the name of religion. Iran's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, also made it clear in his opening speech that "the Islamic Republic poses no threat to any Islamic country," *a message well received by Iran's Gulf* neighbours and Iraq. Despite the virtually unanimous rejection of Turkey's military ties with Israel and continued intervention in northern Iraq, *the summit's final resolutions refrained from mentioning* Turkey explicitly in a bid to avoid alienating Ankara.

One message, however, did come across loud and clear: the dissatisfaction felt by the leaders of the Islamic world, and the 1.2 billion people they represent, with US policy in the region, notably its blind support of Israel. The Muslim leaders also warned of attempts to foster dissension in the Arab and Islamic world. Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad told the summit that "any difference in our ranks is a source of strength for Israel and an opportunity for infiltration into Arab and Muslim countries." *Iran, the host of this, the largest gathering of international lead*ers since the 1979 Islamic revolution, seeks to make new friends of old foes. Most observers believe that it has managed to do so. Now the ball is in President Khatami's court: he must prove that his new government will follow up on these good resolutions. Muslim leaders must also put slogans of solidarity and brotherhood into effect in order to convince the peoples of the region that this summit, for once, is not just a show of words.

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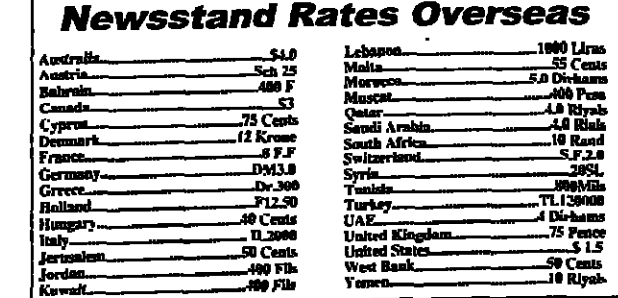
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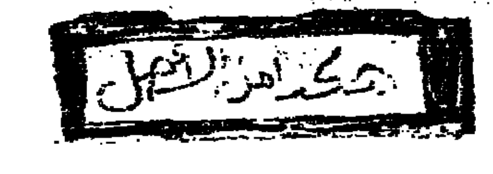
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France	8 F.F	South Africa	10 Rand
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Greece	Dr.300	Syria	20SL
Holland	F12.50	Tunisia	800Mils
Hungary	40 Cents	Turkey	TL130000
Italy	IL2000	UAE	4 Dirhams
Jerusalem	50 Cents	United Kingdom	75 Pence
Jordan	400 Fils	United States	$ 1.5
Kuwait	400 Fils	West Bank	50 Cents
		Yemen	10 Riyals





Close up

Salama A. Salama

After the summit

The OIC summit in Teheran was convened amidst expectations which had little to do with conditions prevailing in the Islamic countries. These exceedingly high hopes may be described as a confrontation with reality; a rift is steadily widening the gap between the Islamic world and the rest of the international community, and most of the Islamic peoples find themselves in a position of isolation very similar to quarantine, because of the threats associated with them and their surroundings.

At least four Islamic countries — Iraq, Libya, Sudan and the host country, Iran — of the 55 participating in the conference, are subject to economic sanctions or an international embargo. The other Islamic countries, either willingly or under great pressure, are participating in the implementation of sanctions. Three or four other Islamic countries are witnessing bloody civil wars that seem endless. These wars are not only destroying hopes for their future, but are also affecting the stability of neighbouring states, most of which are also Islamic countries.

Afghanistan on one side, Algeria, Sudan and Somalia on the other: tens, sometimes hundreds of victims are killed in these countries every day.

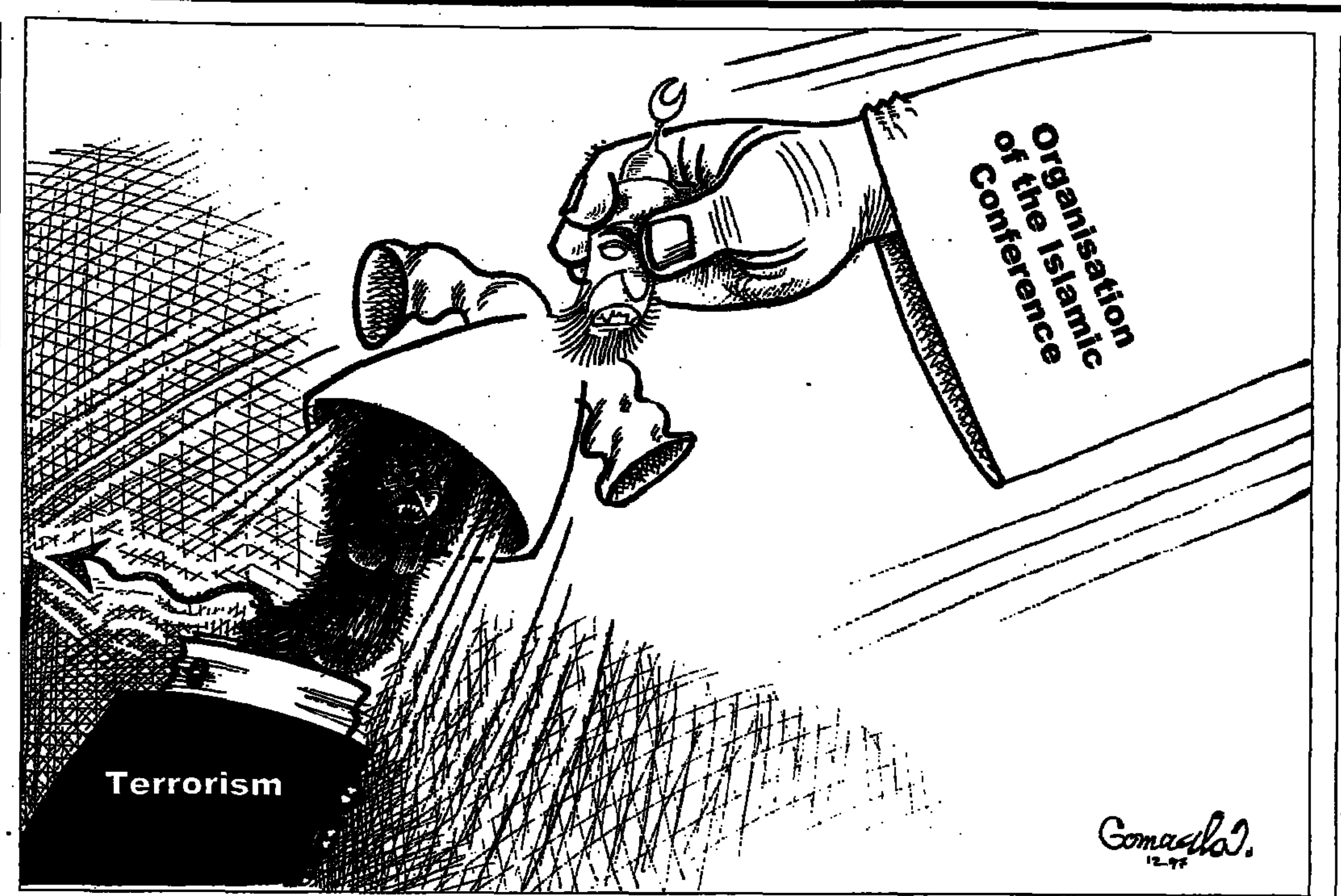
Numerous wars are currently being waged, or threaten to break out at any moment due to the tensions which divide the Islamic countries. The sheer number and complexity of the conflicts are bewildering. But most vital for the Arabs, and most volatile, are the issues involving the conflict with Israel, the occupation of Palestinian lands and Jerusalem, as well as the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon. All these threaten to ignite the situation in the Middle East.

At previous meetings held by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Bosnia problem dominated the sessions. This conference, however, coincides with the Turkish forces' sortie over the Iraqi borders in pursuit of Kurdish groups. Turkey is also preparing to take part in joint military manoeuvres with Israel. As a result, the Bosnian problem has lost its position on the list of priorities, not because Bosnian Muslims have regained their rights, but because a temporary, partial solution was provided by the nations that dominate the world community, principally the US. Meanwhile, the Iraqi people's destiny remains subject to the mercy of America and Britain, on one hand, and to the obduracy of its own rulers, on the other.

After a few days of discussions, the final outcome appears consistent with resolutions adopted in the past. The Arab countries may rejoice over a resolution that exposes and condemns military cooperation between Turkey and Israel, or over a statement deploring terrorism, or urging the confirmation of Palestinian rights and the return of Jerusalem. They may applaud another resolution in defence of the countries suffering under sanctions and an economic blockade. But none of this will be capable of altering the bitter situation engulfing the Islamic nations. There are approximately 142 issues being debated. If the political will of the participating countries was united over the implementation of one tenth of this number, the conference could be deemed a success.

Iran has emerged from its isolation, but many of the other Islamic countries are still in dire straits. This summit, and future meetings, must focus on the methods capable of remedying underdevelopment and inadequacy, in order to meet the challenges of the coming century. The Islamic countries must arm their peoples as they enter the battle for survival, by freeing their potential and guaranteeing their right to freedom and democracy.

The Organisation of the Islamic Conference must review the objectives and tasks of the summit, if it is to be truly effective — in other words, if it is to benefit the Islamic peoples.



Soapbox

Destructive ambiguity

To the "constructive ambiguity" favoured by diplomats, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu prefers destructive equivocation. He has submitted ambiguous proposals to the Israeli Cabinet, limited to his acceptance of the principle that second-phase withdrawal take place under certain conditions, of which the most significant is an immediate move to the final phase. The proposal was approved by near consensus of the Cabinet. This seems to imply acceptance of the Oslo Accords, but in fact it signifies their practical demise. The proposal was immediately rejected by the Palestinian leadership, since it amounts to the abrogation of previous agreements, particularly those following the Hebron Accord.

Netanyahu's unacceptable proposals are aimed at defusing the pressure that culminated in Clinton's refusal to meet him during his last visit to America. It is also designed to circumvent and obstruct all other proposals that Madeleine Albright may mention or put forward in the course of their meeting: he has already revoked the decision to freeze the construction of settlements, continued to insist on the primacy of Israeli security, and delayed redeployment for a further five months.

Albright has said only that both Israelis and Palestinians must make some difficult decisions. She has given Netanyahu another opportunity to postpone the implementation of previous agreements. President Arafat chose to give a positive impression of his meeting with Albright, particularly in view of her statement that the encounter has been useful and constructive. Netanyahu's project, therefore, is still an unknown disaster.



This week's Soapbox speaker is an expert on Palestinian affairs and a columnist with Al-Shaab *newspaper.*

Mahgoub Omar

Isaiah Berlin: An afterthought

A brilliant intellectual, the paragon of liberalism and moderation, was blind in one crucial respect, writes **Edward Said**

November is a mournful month in the history of Palestine. 2 November is the day of Arthur Balfour's 1917 Declaration, which opened the way to the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state. Framing November at the other end is the day in 1947 that the United Nations, under immense US pressure, pushed through the partition resolution on Palestine, thereby conceding about 55 per cent of the country to less than 30 per cent of the population, which at that time had only gained ownership of about seven per cent of the land. The keynote of both these decisions was struck in a memorandum written by Balfour in August 1919, *in which he said: "In Palestine we do not propose even* to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country... The four great powers are committed to Zionism and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long tradition, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desire and prejudices of the *700,000* Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land. In my opinion that is right."

British policy was therefore intent on transforming Palestine demographically during the Mandate, again despite the wishes of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine. And for the period after 1947, Palestinians were intentionally swept aside by a movement and a rhetoric that neither had any use for them nor in effect saw them as more than a temporary threat to the colonisation of Palestine.

In the fifty years since Israel came into existence as a Jewish state, it not only consolidated its hold over the land (especially after 1967), but also painstakingly constructed a whole structure of opinion and discourse in the West that completed the obliteration of the Palestinians as a people that had any rights, or continuity of residence, or conceivable national claims on the territory of historical Palestine. It is a striking fact that that task was undertaken by pro-Zionist Jews as well as non-Jews who stood at the very authoritative centre *of Western society, where their prestige as in*tellectuals, scientists, musicians, authors, artists, politicians, businessmen, and journalists gave weight and credibility to their support for the Zionist project. No comparable body of opinion or opinion-makers existed on the Arab side, with the result that for years the Palestinians were both invisible and silent insofar as their "*desire and prejudices*" (*to use Balfour's disparaging* phrase) were represented in the West. The only member of the British cabinet during Balfour's time who was opposed to Zionism was Lord Curzon, but he absented himself the day of the vote on Balfour's Declaration. But if one thinks of Churchill, Weizmann, Einstein, Freud, Reinhold Niebuhr, Eleanor Roosevelt, Truman, Chagall, the great conductors Otto Klemperer and Arturo Toscanini, plus dozens and dozens of others like them in Britain, the United States, France, and elsewhere in Europe, and then tries to produce a list of Palestinian supporters at the time who might have balanced this tremendous array of influence and prestige, we will find next to nothing.

Among the most famous of Israel's supporters in Britain in the period after 1948 was Sir Isaiah Berlin, a truly remarkable man who was born and grew up in Riga and St Petersburg, but came to Britain when he was twelve. He attended St Paul's School in London, then went to Oxford and more or less remained there until his death at the age of 88 on 5 November 1997. A philosopher by training, he was much more than that, a brilliant general intellectual renowned for his amazing powers of conversation (Churchill considered an evening with Berlin as the highest pleasure), his fabulous memory, his learning and gifts for the most compelling lectures, his charm, his connections with every famous and influential person in the Anglo-Saxon as well as the Israeli-Jewish world, and above all his capacity for attracting talented students, professors, *statesmen, journalists, intellectuals*, philosophers, and philanthropists who revered and loved him. He was the only academic or intellectual who was always referred to by his first name: everyone knew who "Isaiah" was, and everyone considered him to be an ornament of Western culture.

Unlike great figures such as Toynbee, Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre — like Berlin in that they had a universal reputation and were respected by specialists as well as by the general public — Berlin was not a prolific writer at all, and the author mainly of essays and three or four short books (including a rather thin and, in my opinion, inadequate study of Karl Marx). But he had a vast range which, with his excellent Russian, French, German, Italian he put to illuminating use in the history of modern thought, liberalism, opera, personal impressions, and especially his studies of the nineteenth century Russian intelligentsia, two of whom, Turgenev and Herzen, were the subjects of his finest essays.

His most famous book, which I recall reading when I was about twenty, is *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, a study of Tolstoy based on the distinction made by the Greek lyric poet Archilochus between the two animals: the hedgehog, the Greek poet said, had one big idea which he found everywhere; the fox was interested in many little ideas only. Berlin's thesis was that Tolstoy wanted to be a hedgehog, was possessed of a very large general vision of human history and destiny, but in effect, because he was a supremely endowed novelist, he was really a fox, ultimately committed to empirical detail, concrete experience, and observable behavior — the very contrary of what interested the hedgehog. In that book Berlin expressed *his lifelong suspicion of and animosity towards* systems of thought (like Marxism, for example) that promised a solution for everything.

In his most famous essay, "Two Concepts of Liberalism", he elaborated a theory of realistic political freedom, negative (the right not to be persecuted) and positive (the right to positive liberties) that became the hallmark of the Western self-image during the Cold War years and the battle against Stalinism and the Soviet bloc. Berlin stood for balance, reasonableness, intellectual freedom, pragmatism, civilised behaviour. He was the enemy of fanaticism, whether extremism took the form of unfettered rationalism or that of dogmatic passion and system-building. For that reason, then, he found common ground with exiled Russian intellectuals, whose scepticism made life impossible for them in their revolutionary homeland; it was also the reason for his interest in Vico and Herder, whom he called enemies of the Enlightenment, and who, in both his opinion and that of the Russian exiles, had overestimated the possibility of human perfectibility through science and reason.

Over the years I read his work with great interest, and never lost the opportunity to hear him lecture. He was a small man who stood in front of usually very large audiences with a sheaf of papers (which he never consulted) in one hand, and used the other to gesture as his prose poured out with lightning, often incomprehensible speed: he was certainly the most remarkable speaker I have ever heard for his lucidity, the enormous amount of material he packed into his lectures, and the perfect shape of his English sentences, which were always pronounced with a slight trace of his native Russian. I met him a few times, and he was unfailingly cordial; the last time I saw him was a year ago in a London restaurant where he called out to me and insisted on chatting briefly with me about the 18th century Italian philosopher Vico, a great common interest of ours.

His death early in November brought forth a Niagara of obituaries, all of them affectionate, admiring, sorrowful and yet celebratory since it was clear to all who knew him, including myself, that he found life itself a pleasure, a sentiment he was always able to communicate to his friends, audiences, interlocutors. The one discordant note for me about Berlin was that he was a fervent, unquestioning, and unsceptical Zionist, a true believer, whose close involvement with Israel as country and as cause contributed in a major way to the positive image and structure of feelings created in the West about the Jewish state. He was a close personal friend of Chaim Weizmann, whom he describes in an admiring portrait he wrote some years ago as one of the greatest men that he, Berlin, ever knew. Weizmann, Berlin said in that essay, "committed none of these enormities for which men of action, and later their biographers, claim justification on the ground of what is called *raison d'état*."

There is a stunning blindness to this statement which verges on the idolatrous. Weizmann presided over the colonisation of Palestine, he knew about the eviction of the Palestinians, and of course he must have felt all along that, had those things been done to Jews, he would have been the first to call them injustices. In *1944, he told President Roosevelt that "we could not* rest our case on the consent of the Arabs; as long as their consent was asked, they naturally refuse it." Berlin does not mention a word about this. In fact, having read practically everything he wrote, I found to my disappointment that, to the best of my knowledge, he never once said a word about the Palestinians. For him they seemed to have been the inevitable clutter that, once swept away in a higher cause, need never be mentioned or thought of again.

Berlin's last pronouncement, produced in London's *Guardian* on 13 November, was surprisingly a declaration about Israel and the prospects for Middle East peace. Here too, there is never, ever any mention of the Palestinians at all; they are referred to as one of "two sides," as is partition which, Berlin timidly says, might produce a relationship of good neighbours. But he withdraws even from that because, he says, "there are bigoted terrorist chauvinists on both sides," as if it was the case that Palestinians held most of the territory but were prevented from compromise by Muslim terrorists. He never says a word about military occupation, nothing about settlements, nothing about invasions, killings, dispossessions. Instead, he concludes, we must have "reluctant toleration" as a way of preventing war. As for Jerusalem, Berlin concludes that "it must remain the capital of Israel with the Muslim holy places being extra-territorial to a Muslim authority," as if, for instance, Jordan or Saudi Arabia or maybe even Pakistan and Bangladesh could be members of that Muslim authority. Not a word about Palestinian national rights, or Christian rights, or anything of that sort. Palestinians, for the worldly Berlin, do not constitute a people, nor have they been victims of an injustice. They are either "the other side," or members of a group to be ruled over and represented by a "Muslim authority." As for the notion that there is something about *Zionism* that is exclusivist or discriminatory for the "non-Jews" who fall in its path, Berlin says nothing.

It was not only that Berlin supported Israel and never raised a question about the morality of what it did in dispossessing and oppressing an entire people; it is also that he tried to prevent others from doing so, using his enormous prestige and influence to stifle dissent and silence opposition.

Noam Chomsky told me two stories that are worth repeating here. In the late 1960s, while giving a series of political lectures at Oxford, Chomsky devoted one to the Middle East situation and, as usual, was extremely critical of Israel. The next morning, Berlin visited him and said that, even though he might have agreed with some of what Chomsky said, he had come to tell the celebrated intellectual dissident that Jews should not speak about Israel that way in public. Chomsky was of course unpersuaded, although they remained friends. The second incident took place in the mid-1980s, when Chomsky wrote a solicited article for *Index on Censorship* about the way Israel's actions are either not reported properly or covered up in the Western media. From behind the scenes Berlin organised a campaign to try to stop the magazine from printing Chomsky's article; he got influential friends of his to write letters of protest, in many ways attempted to harm the magazine (*which did publish* Chomsky after all), and even tried to get it closed.

The contradiction in all this is plain: that Berlin was a liberal, a man of fairness and compassion, of civilised moderation in everything, except where Israel was concerned. There he acted with the kind of unblinking zeal that fanatics of either the Right or the Left might *have felt, but which in all his work on other subjects* Berlin deplored. In that sense, Berlin was an organic intellectual for Israel, a man so closely allied with the interests of that state — especially when those interests overrode fairness and humanity — that his readers and admirers were led by his example to celebrate Israel and overlook the injustice of its actions. One cannot say that Berlin *fabricated untruths* on *behalf of Israel*. But he did lend himself to the same blindness that ordinary Zionists had for the Palestinians, whose only crime was that they happened to be in Palestine — which, as Balfour said, was a piece of immensely significant geography that had too great an importance for the mere desire and prejudices of its native inhabitants.

There is an even greater misfortune for us as Palestinians: that none of us — and I do not excuse myself at all — were able to engage with Berlin on the question of Palestine. I regret that I never brought the matter up in our conversations, and I regret that I can only do so in this manner, after his life and work have been accomplished. Berlin's legacy, however, lives on, and the best we can do now is to make sure that his disciples, friends and colleagues in the Zionist movement will add a new and more realistic dimension to their thought about the future of Middle East peace.

To The Editor

Open letter to the OIC

International PEN, the world-wide association of writers sponsored this open letter to the heads of states participating in the Islamic Conference (8-11 December 1997, Tehran). Below is the full text

We speak today as writers engaged in the constant struggle to defend our right — and the right of our colleagues around the world — to express ourselves freely without fear of reprisal. This week, two significant events coincide: International Human Rights Day (10 December) and the Islamic Conference in Tehran (8-11 December). In light of the rich literary heritage of the participating countries, we wish to draw attention to the plight of many writers who must struggle every day with the unacceptable choice to either protect their own safety and remain silent; or to speak their minds and risk imprisonment, torture and even death. In Tehran this week, many people will speak, and many will be spoken of: we wish to mention a few who will not.

We turn our attention first to the host country of the conference, the Islamic Republic of Iran. By censoring many of its brightest literary figures and silencing dissent, the government has gone to great lengths to undermine Iran's long and distinguished tradition of letters. The editor, Faraj Sarkubi, is imprisoned today for nothing more than attempting to speak his mind. He will not be on any agenda at the Conference, but his presence in a cell somewhere nearby will surely cast a cloud over the proceedings. So will the improper investigations into the deaths of writers and intellectuals such as Soltanpoor, Saidi-Sirjani, Mir'ala'i, Tafazzoli, and Zalzadeh. The recent suppression of Simin Behbahani shows that the signatories of the "1994 Declaration of 134 Iranian Writers" remain in danger of today.

It is not only in Iran that writers have been censored, imprisoned, exiled, or killed by official and unofficial groups. In Algeria, Abdel-Kadr Alloula, the playwright, filmmaker and actor was gunned down for his denunciation of violence. In Syria, the poet, Faraj Birqdar, has been imprisoned for ten years. In Kuwait, Iraqi poet Khalaf Alwan Jallud Al-Maliki is serving 15 years in prison. In Iraq, Aziz Al-Syed Jasim, journalist and author, is imprisoned indefinitely for refusing to write a book about Saddam Hussein. In Turkey, Recep Marasli, a publisher, was arrested in March 1997 for expressing his views on Kurdish culture and identity. Even writers of international stature, such as Turkey's Yasar Kamal and Egypt's Naguib Mahfouz, have been targeted in recent years. We condemn these violations irrespective of the perpetrator. We appeal to the participants in the Islamic conference to put an end to these abuses and to promote freedom of expression which will inevitably enrich their cultural heritage.

We believe that the coincidence of International Human Rights Day and the 1997 Islamic Conference points to a larger truth in which the caprices of chance play no part: try as they may, governments who repress their own citizens cannot escape the standard of freedom set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. *As we celebrate the declaration's forty-ninth anniversary this week, we reaffirm our commitment to human rights and our conviction that all leaders who violate such principles as freedom of expression shall witness the erosion of their power, and shall be defeated by the strength inherent in words.*

Edward Albee
Homero Aridjis
Yasar Kamal
Edward Said
Michael Scammell
Anthony Appia
Paul Auster
Nadine Gordimer
Arthur Miller

El-Hakim remembered

Sir- In your otherwise excellent coverage of its official opening last week, I was very surprised to see a Mexican architect credited with the design of the new Aswan Museum. The designer of the Aswan Museum was in fact a great Egyptian architect, the late Mahmoud El-Hakim, who also designed the Luxor Museum.

With several hundred other people, I personally witnessed the official laying of the cornerstone for this building in March 1980; and all of us can vouch that the only architect at the ceremony, as the building's sole designer, was El-Hakim.

The site was changed and shifted by officialdom several times, only to return after years of delay to the area of Aswan, which Mahmoud had designated from the beginning. Though liberties were taken with his design, the original and basic conception will certainly be remembered as his alone.

John Rodenbeck
American University in Cairo

Tragic aftermath

Sir- In view of the recent tragedy in Luxor, and as someone who visits Egypt regularly, I would like to say how saddened I have been on this occasion when I visited Aswan and Cairo, seeing the appalling effect which it has had on the country and particularly on the tourist trade.

I feel this is a pity, as most of us who come to Egypt have always felt welcomed and enjoyed Egypt's hospitality. Naturally one can understand the fears of the tourists, but it would be good if somehow the message could get across that this terrible act has been perpetrated by a very small minority and the ordinary Egyptian in the street is as welcoming and friendly as they have always been.

Personally, I hope it will not be long before people are coming again to enjoy all that Egypt has to offer.

John Coleman
London

Salvation in silver

David Blake goes to heaven on a trumpet

Handel's Messiah*: The Cairo Choral Society and The Cairo Symphony Orchestra: Valerie De Cassas (soprano), Yasmine Tayeby (treble), Barbara Comar (contralto), George Wanis (tenor), David Gwesyn Smith (bass); Larry Catlin, conductor; Ewart Hall, 3 December and All Saints Cathedral, 4 December*

What is the *Messiah*? Not exactly anything at all. Not opera, not symphonic-instrumental, not chamber and strings. Religious? Yes. Like some other of the musical greats, Handel was religious in a special, personal way. Like Verdi and Wagner, he was operatic. He felt religion almost as a theatrical gesture. Everything Handel wrote has a religious basis, but he abhorred that religiosity which is an easy bridge for the more ordinary of the world to cross over into paradise. Handel, like Verdi and Wagner, was a sort of god. He was joyful. He saw God in everything. A lovelorn turtle, a sweet bird soaring to heaven on Milton's words. Caesar and Cleopatra heading *out into their triumphant tragedies*, all ultimately fit into a god-like pattern. This the *Messiah* proposes but never explains.

Cairo had two evenings of this strange creation, Handel's own invention, oratorio. The artists and all concerned were the same performers on both nights. The endroit, sadly not. The performance in the very capacious, rather bleak Ewart Hall suffered from the effects the Ewart shares with the Small Hall at the Opera. A sound mangeuse, the Ewart ate most of the *Messiah*, leaving merely wispy pieces for the large audience. Sad, because the turn out of performers on both nights was first rate. No matter how fiercely the music goes along, something gnaws the heart out of it in the Ewart. Even Handel was partly devoured.

The music, *like all Handel, is simple, direct, no* drudgery about it, completely confident and perfectly composed. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra *and the Cairo Choral Society on the first night* were active and assured. Larry P Catlin as conductor always enjoys himself, and does not mind showing this to the audience. It warms things up which in the big Ewart Hall is a bonus.

This thing, the *Messiah*, tells the story of the Christ from birth through what is called death, out into the other area which is called salvation. It is cleverly done to keep the whole narrative ever moving and thrusting with the chorus largely, in the Greek manner, as commentator and explainer. The Cairo Choral Society was perfectly splendid. Words were meaningful and clear.

The orchestra had two different evenings, as, indeed, did the rest of the big ensemble: Ewart and the cathedral of All Saints, Zamalek, where the second performance took place. The Cairo Symphony is having a ball these days, and much was expected. Ewart, however, was disappointing. We had to wait for All Saints to have our expectations gratified.

In the Ewart Hall, tenor George Wanis had the tension of opening this immense thing. His voice in the Ewart was rather a cry in the wilderness — but *more was to come*. The bass David Gwesyn Smith must carry a big load in the *Messiah*. Fire and brimstone, darkness and grief, light, joy and deliverance. On the first night, up until the trumpets sounded, he was rather misty, but so was everything else. So the fault was not his, but the correct feelings were always in the voice.

The contralto Barbara Comar! She told of the coming of the Christ, the good tidings, but with little Christmas spirit. Rising and shining were not in her voice. From the shadow of death, well intoned by the bass, the *Messiah* suddenly emerges into a light and airy Handel.

Ewart, and maybe all concert halls, respond to the vernal, leafy interlude Handel composed to light up this section of his oratorio of joy. Catlin and the orchestra danced along through *Unto us a child is born*. People do tire of the *Messiah*. It has been going strong for so long, a midnight express that has hurtled through the ages of man since 1742. Even now it holds its own in the age of grunge and brute and it is easy to see why.


Handel (1685 - 1759)

A treble angel, almost invisible in the Ewart Hall, flutes the ballad of the shepherds keeping their watch at night, which has the sentiment of a Beatles song, direct and straight to the heart of anyone. The singer Yasmine Tayeby sang it pure and sweet as maron glacée, but not much of it was left after the Ewart Hall had had its fill.

The soprano, Valerie de Cassas, joins the performance. A late comer, but in Rejoice greatly, a much needed one. Handel was a sophisticated Christian and a complete cosmopolitan. He made an occasion of everything. A soprano? Then, let the listener hear her perform on the trapeze. His music for all voices is quite devilish, but especially for soprano. He invented the female opera singing diva when she took over from the castrati, but he chose from both always the best. The *Messiah* soprano arias, only three compared to the bass's five, have been staple soprano training since the *Messiah was created*. Valerie de Cassas is a highly trained singer — and it shows. In the Ewart Hall she sounded distant, but quite unfazed. Her knowledge and technique were there in waiting for the All Saints' spaces.

After the intermission came the big stuff of the *Messiah*. The audience all stood to attention as they did in England in Handel's time as potty old George II entered the hall. It is part of the panoply that God takes second place to royalty. And then the show, for Christmas, really got under way. Christmas becomes the *Messiah*, all shiny, hopeful and snowy.

The scene is then left wide open to the chorus, soprano and bass. The soprano's splendid *I know that my redeemer liveth* brought de Cassas releasing her fine, shining top voice. The bass's, Behold I tell *you a mystery, positively rang out*. Then came the trumpets.

Handel loved brass, both types, cash and all powerful *shining wind instruments. From the beginning* of his second appearance at All Saints, George Wanis was resuscitated and began his apostrophe to the *Valley of Jordan* with ringing high tones. Then, from *Let the trumpets sound* the performance took fire. Handel was joyful. The mood quickened the entire place and became surely what cathedrals are for: a space full of enthralled people seeing and hearing the glory and music of the gods. Larry Catlin and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra reveled in the dazzle of the silver trumpet as it pierced the air and the entire ensemble swam through the silver waters.

Some voice or other, a power spirit, gave out the message: Be joyful. Handel's Christmas tree is here, glittering and glorious. Not a bad Christmas present.

Bad girls never die

Flesh and the Devil are routed by the Sign of the Cross

The année de la France en Egypte reaches a climax that began on Tuesday 9 December with the production in the Grande Salle of the Cairo Opera House of Jules Massenet's *Thais*, the opera of life in ecstatic, erotic Alexandria during the grand last days of its decadence. The French year is proving the best of all years. So far it has introduced three great conductors: Rouits, Rophé and now Patrick Fournillier, whose work is as far reaching as it is celebrated. The opera *Thais* has five performances here, the last on 18 December. Cairo is fortunate to have the opportunity of see*ing it. The work is great, un*der-rated even by the French themselves, so the chance is unique. Take it. See it.

It has taken the team who works with the Massenet Festival at Saint Etienne years of devoted, hard labour to convince the opera world of Massenet's greatness. Italian opera has the same problem: the Verisimo makes no appeal to them, so a little masterpiece, Giordano's *Fedora* is, like *Thais*, completely annihilated by fashion critics. With *Thais* it is a question of time and style. Massenet used to be all the rage in the gayest part of the 90s. It was the great European War of 1914-18 which sank such things.

Thais was a scandal in 1894 when it was first produced. She, Thais, was a prostitute with a taste for bright lights *and expensive things and the* men who provided them. She is loved by a monk who reviles her way of life. He preaches salvation. She takes the advice, abandons him and chooses God instead, and he is left to die as she herself, on a halo of lilies, mounts to heaven as a saint. Not so much corn as it sounds. Anatole France wrote the novel from which the libretto takes its name. Not the story, but the style and reputation of the opera sank it.

Thais calls for a special sort of glamorous allure which two wars erased. The singing sirens of the opera adored it. Mary Garden, Debussy's muse, promised Chicago she would do Thais mostly in the nude. No less than J.P. Morgan *himself became involved* in the fuss. Another imperial bauble, Maria Jeritza, made a *hit in it. She was clothed* however. The opera lasted until Leontine Price sang it in New York within living memory. But it was always under the cloud of being passé. The team at Saint Etienne have brought it back to life and Cairo will see how its own dramatic soprano Iman Mustafa will make of it.

The music is silky and richly sensuous, the opera well-constructed, but its aura is of a past too recent to be history — like dresses by Paul Poiret and Maggey Rouff or a stylish Irving Thalberg movie *Rip Tide* of the late 30s, all killed by the other war of 1939.

Thais used to be called bedroom opera — vulgar, rude, but rather on the mark. After *all, in those days they had* no TV, video or smog catastrophes. By 1997 society has toughened up a lot. Today Thais, instead of metaphysical conversations with her Monk to Massenet's sexy music, would take the first plane to Vegas there to entrap a big mob male for company.

The team of Fournillier, musical director, Jean-Louis Pichon, producer, Michel Theuil, lighting expert, Alexandre Heyraud, decor, Frederic Pineau, costumes, all offer pleasures to come. The cast is Iman Mustafa in her first great major role, Evgueni Demertjev, the sensational young Bulgarian baritone, as Athaneal, the lustful monk from the desert, Reda El-Wakil, bass baritone, as Palemon, Hassan Kami as Nicias, rich Alexandrian playboy and *Mona Rafla as Crobyle. The* artistic director is Pascale Balin-Rossi.

Musically the French year has already offered la gloire. Hopefully there will be plenty left to illuminate this intriguing opera.

DB

Theatre

The way of all flesh

Nehad Selaiha watches *Thoughts and Impressions* made flesh in Karim El-Tonsi's latest experiment at Al-Hanager

After launching Al-Hanager Dance Theatre Troupe in 1996 with *Al-Radwa*, followed within six months by *The Other Side of Silence*, Karim El-Tonsi has embarked on a new and exciting route and decided to explore for himself and his generation the expressive potential of movement away from formal dance. For three and a half months he worked with a *group of* young men and women of varied social and cultural backgrounds, most of them with no previous acting experience whatsoever, and the result was *Thoughts and Impressions*, presented at Al-Hanager last week.

In the programme El-Tonsi describes this movement piece as a 'demonstration' and a 'collage' and adds: 'I am dealing here with raw material and it should be presented raw, with no flavours or spices.' Such statements always make me feel suspicious: they seem like attempts to forestall any formal artistic appraisal of the work and to shift the responsibility for whatever faults or shortcomings onto the performers. Worse still, the statement is a blatant contradiction in terms since any 'dealing with' raw material implies a degree of interference with its raw state, interference, in this instance, that obviously involved a substantial degree of artistic framing and organisation through music and lighting.

Fortunately I only read El-Tonsi's note after the performance and can therefore understand what he is getting at and forgive him his atrocious way of putting it. (Dancers and musicians are *notorious* for verbal impotence and messing up words.) What comes across from *Thoughts* is a post-modernist impulse to break through the defined categories of meaning and discursive thought and reach towards a kind of *concrete* thinking through the body — a process, unconceptual by definition, where ideas are replaced by volatile and evanescent intuitive states of being. To achieve this kind of concrete thinking (a term coined by existentialist philosophers) through the body, the performer has to submit to what Zeami, instructing the *Noh shite* in the fifteenth century, called the excruciating 'dialectical tension between what is seen by the mind (*tai*) and what is seen by the eyes (*yu*).' In his book *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, Richard Schechner quotes Tatsuro Ishii who has investigated the later writing of the *Noh drama* instructor Zeami on this: "*tai* can be interpreted as a fundamental texture in acting dependent on the mind of a performer, and *yu* is the outer, visual manifestation." More recently, and in the same vein, Grotowski described the performer's task as 'an act of self-penetration' which 'reveals' and 'sacrifices the innermost part of' the self — 'the most painful, that which is not intended for the eyes of the world.' It is in this context that we should understand El-Tonsi's description of 'the material of this performance' as 'so sensitive' and, one might add, recklessly honest and daring.

What "is not intended for the eyes of the world" is what we get in *Thoughts and Impressions* through what seems like impulsive, free movement, accompanied by a musical collage which ranges from North African folk songs to the film soundtracks of the *Kama Sutra* and *The English Patient*. The underlying principle one detects in the movement sequences is one of 'flow' punctuated with moments of arrest and formally controlled outbursts of collective energy. Framing this kinetic flux of writhing, swirling, slithering, rolling, sliding, slipping, crawling, creeping and simple walking movement is a sensitive lighting design where blue and red — projected in different degrees of intensity, often shading off into smoky, sunset purple or fading into a foggy, grey pallor — are the dominant colours. The rhythms of day and night, ebb and flow, merging and separation control the process of communication and meaning-production both on stage and in the auditorium. Audience and performers alike fall under the hypnotic spell of distant primeval rhythms and dimly remembered longings and nebulous fears. In one mesmerising, trance-like moment, the rites of ablution, physical purification and purgation merged with pagan fertility rites when Nabila Hamdi and Mona Prince (nearly reduced to silhouettes by the lighting), having repeatedly washed themselves in the sea (made of the swirling bodies of the other actors), and communicated to us, almost physically, their extreme sensuous pleasure in the act, plunge into the waves and embrace the wavy male recumbent bodies, riding and rolling on them, and diving beneath them. The powerful and vivid sensuality of this metaphoric act came across as an overwhelming, primitive assertion of life as a pagan, undifferentiated explosion of animal energy free of all cultural taboos and moral inhibitions and beyond any categorisation of good and bad. The performers' unbridled urge to liberate their bodies and be ruled by them, their exhilarating physical abandon (as raw as you can get), and the intensity and seeming spontaneity of their gestural and physical interactions combined to project, perhaps for the first time on the Egyptian stage, a concrete image of human sexuality in the broader, unsexist meaning of the word.

What was particularly moving about El-Tonsi's *Thoughts* was its acknowledged hesitancy and painful uncertainty — its implicit recognition of the fragility and transience of the body and its defiant celebration of it, with all its imperfections, as the only sure thing we have. This explains why the body here, unlike in most dance theatre works, did not feature as an instrument of formal, aesthetic composition, was not reduced to lines and masses to compose spatial patterns, but was rather highlighted in all its pathetic vulnerability, sensual appeal, and overpowering, transitory eloquence. What one carries away from *Thoughts* is not a group of thoughts and ideas, but a painful physical sensation of being physically alive — an anguished realisation of the weight of being, an ecstatic revelling in the capacity to 'touch', and through touching to discover magical epiphanies.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Abu Bakr El-Nawawi, Mervat Refaat & Mohamed Sabry (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 13 Dec.

May He Live Forever
British Council Gallery, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 13 Dec.
A display of books, pictures and drawings, with audio-visual documentation from the 1920s, relating to the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and Egyptology.

Abdou Ramzi (Sculpture)
Zeinab Khatoun House, behind El-Azhar Mosque. Tel 340 2287. Daily exc Fri, 10-9pm. Until 14 Dec.

André Gelpke (Photographs)
Goethe Institute, 5 El-Bustan St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 19 Dec.
Aspects of contemporary photography under the title Nostalgia.

Group Show
Faculty of Fine Arts, Zamalek. Until 21 Dec.
Five artists from the Saint-Etienne Fine Arts Faculty exhibit their work.

Zeinab El-Saginy (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9pm. Until 23 Dec.
Works under the title Egyptian Tales.

Members of the Photographic Salon of Egypt
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American Uniersity in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 23 Dec.

Golo (Cartoons)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 23 Dec.

Ralf Korte (Installations)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-9pm. Until 24 Dec.
Works under the title Gain of Time.

Les Souffles
Museum of Modern Art, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 24 Dec.

Effat Hosni (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Opening 15 Dec. 7pm. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 25 Dec.

Assem Sharaf (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel. 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6-9pm. Gathering around the artist's work 14 Dec, 7pm. Until 30 Dec.

Farghali Abdel-Hafiz (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Opening 12 Dec. 7pm. Daily 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 3 Jan.
Works under the title Love in Venice.

Collective Exhibition
Sheba Gallery, 6 Sri Lanka St, Zamalek. Tel 340 9192. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 9 Jan.
Jewelry by Suad Raja and Zina Hemady, textiles by Sylva Nasrallah and Michel Pastore, pottery by Evelyne Porret and Suzanne Wissa Wassef, and watercolour paintings and ink drawings by Rana Chalabi.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

FILMS

The Kite
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex-Bustan St), Downtown. Tel 578 6833. 17 Dec, 6.30pm.
Directed by Hala Khalil.

The Yellow Handkerchief
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 354 9431. 10 Dec, 6pm:
Directed by Yoji Yamada (1977).

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
13 Dec, 6pm: Un Amore Senza Fine, directed by Zefirelli.
14 Dec, 6pm: Blow Up (1967), directed by M. Antonioni.

French Films
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679.
17 Dec, 7pm: Le Bonheur, directed by Agnès Varda.
15-18 Dec: Peter Brook films (check with venue).
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824.
16 Dec, 7pm: Le Samouraï, directed by Jean-Pierre Melville.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Metro
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Thur-Sat midnight show.
With Eddie Murphy.

Face/Off
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
An intelligent and entertaining action film with John Travolta and Nicolas Cage.

Conspiracy Theory
MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Julia Roberts.

My Best Friend's Wedding
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.
Another Julia Roberts.

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Golo

The Peacemaker
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm.
With Nicole Kidman.

Jackie
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown, Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm.
With Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and singer Mohamed Fouad.

Hanheb We Ne'eb (We'll Love and Rise Above)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm.
With Farouq El-Fishawi.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

MUSIC

Opera Thaïs
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 11, 14, 16 & 18 Dec, 8pm.
The Cairo Opera Company, with soloists Iman Mostafa, Eugenie Demarchiev, Hassan Kamy, Reda El-Wakil and Mona Rafla, perform under conductor Patrick Fourniller and director Jean-Louis Pichon.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdeen. Tel 391 9956. 11 Dec, 9pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Akhnaton Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 12 Dec, 8pm.
Compositions by Mozart performed by Nevine Allouba, Gihan El-Nasser, Mohamed Abul-Khair, Ashraf Sweilam and Raouf Zeidan; conducted by Sherif Mohieddin.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 13 Dec, 8pm.
Christmas concert conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

Trio Ansalone, Ruffini and Lambertini
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 14 Dec, 8pm.
The tenor, soprano and pianist, respectively, perform traditional Italian songs.

Christmas Concert
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 16 Dec, 8pm.
Pianist Massimo Lambertini performs selections from Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Rossini and the traditional Christmas repertoire.

Egyptian Musical Youth
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 16 Dec, 8pm.

The Osiris Singers
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 17 Dec, 8pm.

Cairo Opera Dance Theatre
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdeen. Tel 391 9956. 15-17 Dec, 9pm.
Directed by Walid Aouni.

THEATRE

Stories
Wallace Theatre, Greek Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. 11-15 Dec, 8pm.
A collection of folk tales from around the world, adapted for the stage and directed by Eric Grischkat.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinat Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.

Taht El-Tahdid (Under Threat)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 5937 948. Daily 9.30pm.

El-Establ (The Stable)
El-Talia, as above. Daily 8pm.

Zizo Mahboub Zamanoh (Zizo the Beloved of His Time)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent to University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. Daily 10.30am.

Alabanda
El-Fardos Theatre, El-Beohth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 9.30pm.

Cinderella
Puppet Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 0954. Daily 6.30pm; Fri & Sun 11am.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Haram. Tel 386 3952. Daily 8.30pm; Wed & Thur 10pm.

LECTURES

Preserving Old Gourna As Part of Our Culural Heritage
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 11 Dec, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Nawal Mahmoud Hassan, Centre for Egyptian Civilization Studies.

Tutankhamun's Chariot Reconsidered
British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. 14 Dec, 6pm.
Lecture by Edwin Brock.

***New Discoveries Around the Pyr*amid of Tety**
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 15 Dec, 6pm.
Lecture, with slides, by Dr Zahi Hawwas, general director of the Supreme Council of Antiquities for the Giza and Saqqara Pyramids.

From Altitude to Attitude: Aerial Archaeology in the Middle Nile Valley
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo, 11 Mahalla St, Heliopolis. Tel 415 6278. 16 Dec, 6pm.
Lecture by Dr Bogdan Zurawski from the Research Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology, Polish Academy of Science.

Entre Littérature et Politique: Transformations de l'Institution Littéraire, des Années 60s aux Années 90s
CEDEJ, 14 Dr Abdel-Rahman El-Sawi St (ex-Gam'eyet El-Nisr), Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 16 Dec, 5pm.
Lecture in French by Richard Jacquemond, CEDEJ.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by
Injy El-Kashef

Around the galleries


Helmi El-Touni

RECENTLY the Centre of Art, Zamalek, hosted paintings by **Helmi El-Touni** and watercolours by **Yehia Abu Hamda**. El-Touni's have legends and tales from 1001 Nights as their source of inspiration. Reminiscent of folkloric wall paintings, these are playful, bright and well executed.

Abu Hamda's watercolours, which are of Egyptian rural scenes and Mecca, have a sketch-like feel to them, which is not to say that they do not show control of the medium. On the contrary.

Reviewed by
Nagwa El-Ashri

Home is where she took us

Nur Elmessiri is pleased to meet *Quatre Femmes d'Egypte*

From left: Wedad Mitri, Amina Rashid, Safinaz Qazim and Shahinda Maqled

Four women walk arm in arm, engagé, in Al-Qanatir — not the prison, but the great outdoors. They are the protagonists of Tahani Rached's docudrama *Quatre Femmes d'Egypte*, which won the Public's Prize and the prize for Best Documentary at the Portugal Film Festival. And what women!

Safinaz Qazim is a New York educated drama critic and writer, a committed Muslim who, for over two decades, has been engaged in the venture of interpreting and living her life from what she calls an Islamic perspective. Shahinda Maqled grew up in the countryside, where her father was a senior police officer, and was engaged in the peasant struggle against feudal landlords, losing her husband, Salah Hussein in the battle. He was assassinated in Kamshish in 1966.

Wedad Mitri, a former teacher of philosophy, had been engaged in the Marxist movement since she was a philosophy student at Cairo University in the 1950s, and was imprisoned for her political activities for two years in the early 1960s. Amina Rashid, a professor of French literature, was educated in Paris, where she spent more than 20 years before returning to Egypt in 1980, only to be arrested in 1981 for her opposition to the Camp David accords. Qazim, Maqled and Mitri have been intimate friends since the mid 1960s, and they came to know Rashid when she came back to Egypt and, with the exception of Mitri, they all spent time in Qanatir Women's Prison.

There was much footage in *Quatre Femmes* of Gamal Abdel-Nasser, the kind that was markedly absent from *Nasser '56*. And why shouldn't there be in a film about these four women? After all, Nasser the charismatic leader, Nasser the era, Nasser the locus in which questions about social injustice, Palestine, women's rights, agrarian reform, political prisons are still often raised, was and remains central to the formation of the four women's sense of identity. "After the high dam, we will have electricity", "after the high dam..." "after the high dam...", Safinaz telling of how, long before she ceased to be Nasserite, she answered the queries of her American colleagues about Egypt. "And do you have snow in Egypt?" "After the high dam," she laughs, "I said we will have snow." Cut to an image of the presidential car, just after the completion of the High Dam, white confetti pouring down.

"All this talk about the past often bothers me": Wedad Mitri's daughter Reem (who also happens to be the assistant director of *Quatre Femmes*). Sometimes it does get on one's nerves. But in terms of a friendship that was born in the Nasser years, the Nasser footage does not merely provide a historical context in which to locate the four women of the film; it also reveals something personal about them. These are women who in a chat over tea will discuss political issues, women to whom Nasser appears in dreams. Theirs is a friendship which is not a smugly safe haven from history. At least once in the course of the film we see a moment of friction, a tense moment in which friendship is threatened by ideological and temperamental differences.

It is no small achievement on the part of the director that "what women!", and not "what a documentary!", is the viewer's immediate response. The film does not merely "capture" or pin down its subjects on celluloid but, rather, enables the complexity and dynamism of each of the women to come across the screen and into the auditorium, all but eradicating the line dividing spectacle from spectator. To enable someone other than oneself to come across, to provide them with a space in which they can "be themselves", as it were, requires a rare talent. Like a host who knows well the fine art of being hospitable without being overwhelming, Rached's docudrama provides a space, a mise-en-scene, in which everyone can feel comfortable, free, and quite at home. We come out of the auditorium feeling that we were the fifth guest at a get-together where we met four women, came to know them intimately, had some sense of each's essence in motion, irreducible to a type we already knew. And each is certainly her own type: Safinaz, Wedad, Shahinda, Amina.

Amina Rashid, hair à-la-garcon, the laughter she elicits a function of her charming innocence, speaks French and "broken" Arabic. And why shouldn't she? In her first, parental home, French was the order of the day. A sense of alienation was triggered in her when once, long ago, a school girl threw a stone at her, outside her almost palatial house (now a school) because she was the granddaughter of Ismael Sidqi Pasha, a prime minister during the monarchy and labelled an "enemy of the people" by the national movement. This sense of alienation is part of her identity. She tells us, in French, of how one of the conscript soldiers taking her to prison (he, too, alienated, in this case from a thankless job which he did not choose,) called her *ukhti*. Home is where, embedded in French, hidden in the recesses of a prison van, the Arabic word for sister is whispered.

Safinaz Qazim takes us on a tour of her home. She shows us the chest in which she keeps mementos from university years in the '60s in the US. The camera shows us books, many in English by European and American writers, some in Arabic by Safinaz. She, in *hijab*, takes us to her bedroom. And why shouldn't she? She is uninhibited, does not stand on ceremony, is up front. This is the bed with bed knobs she had made to resemble a child's bed she once saw in a Disney film, the bed on which, when she was on "anti-health" (anti-depressant) pills, she could lie down, half-hoping that the new international world order would forget all about her. She tells us a lot about herself: the days when, back-packing, she and her sister hitchhiked across Europe, and about the moment when she realised that she liked herself, a Muslim and, after visiting Mecca, did not uncover her hair.

Safinaz, some might object, gets the lion's share of screening time. But Safinaz is, after all, the most gregarious and, sometimes perhaps, the most overwhelming of the four. If form should be adequate to content, then it makes good sense that Safinaz should have the highest profile. And, if it was mainly a Western audience that Rached had in mind, then the not-so-demure-*mohaggaba* (nothing surprising to an Arab audience, but illuminating if, before the film, you had been thinking in stereotypical "Orientalist" terms of the Veiled Woman) is the one who requires the most time and space in which to be explicated, to unfold.

Wedad Mitri, by contrast, has the lowest profile. She is there, thick hair braided and pinned up across the head today as it was in photos taken decades ago, statuesque, dignified, quiet in her presence. Not the quietness of one who is shy or petite in her being, but of one who is reserved and, in such reserve, exudes the strength of a character who does not desperately need to have her being corroborated by others. In at least two of the scenes that focus on her, it is her daughter who gives her the cue to show the spectator her wares — newspaper clippings, old photographs, testimonies of her achievements.

Shahinda Maqled smiles, incredibly "feminine", an impish twinkle in her eyes on the verge of tapering into a tear, a smile trembling on the brink of a sob. Wedad is showing a group photo by the sea: Shahinda's and Wedad's children, Shahinda somewhere between child and mother, and Wedad, arms encircling the fold — a cross between Isis and Artemis: matronly, maidenly, dignified. Wedad: "friend, sister, mother, teacher" of Shahinda who, till this very day, over 30 years after the event, is traumatized by the murder of her husband-cousin Salah Hussein (Worried about her daughter's future with a political activist, Shahinda's mother, Shahinda recounts impishly of their elopement, had told Salah's mother that she would cut Shahinda into many pieces, Osiris-style, before she let her daughter become Salah's wife). Home is where myth, historical moment, personal circumstance converge. Home is where a family extends — beyond creed or kinship.

Rooms, jam-packed with all manner of documents, books, papers, prison memoirs written on the back of Kent cigarette packets. Tea kettles. A meal around a *tabliyya* in a rural home. Forget about the picture postcard views of the Citadel, the palm trees swaying in the wind, the moment in the church "balancing" the moment in the mosque. While the director was unable to completely resist such sentimental images, thankfully they are not too many. The images of women selling fruits and vegetables, of crowded downtown buses, of Abbasiyya streets, were better. These succinctly gave us a sense of Everyman going about his daily business and thus accentuated the individuality of the four women.

The film, as was remarked in the discussion that followed the screening, could have been shorter. (Had it been shorter, perhaps it would have steered clear of the risk of didacticism to which it came close... but, then again, if it was a Western audience that the director had in mind, perhaps the length was one of the dictates of clarity).

The film brought these four women home in the viewer's mind, and did so with much mirth, song and laughter. Rached, one felt, carried out her directorial function in a manner opposed to the dictum quoted as an epigraph to Edward Said's *Orientalism*: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." And in so doing, she managed to make a documentary about which the tedious questions of "Egypt's image" or of how "representative" Amina, Safinaz, Wedad or Shahinda are of the abstraction called "the Egyptian Woman" seem superfluous. Such is the nature of Tahani Rached's sensitive sense of hospitality.

A vote for women

Khairiya El-Bishlawi reviews some highlights from the first week of the film festival

Opinions on the 21st Cairo International Film Festival are widely divergent, sometimes wildly so, not least because of the circumstances that preceded the current round.

To start with, there is the question of who will succeed to the crown of the festival, after the death of Saadeddin Wahba, its previous head. Is it to be an individual or a team? And who has the best credentials? The followers of the late journalist Kamal El-Mallakh, who founded the festival 21 years ago, or the team who worked with Saadeddin Wahba since 1985 and helped him give the festival international standing? Or is there another possible group, standing in the wings? Or will the minister of culture surprise us all by himself settling the question of who will be heir to the throne?

There is a sense among observers that there is a sort of disintegration at work in the structure of the festival and attempts to question the bases and rationale of the whole event. After the grief over Saadeddin Wahba that characterised the opening ceremony of the festival, the panelists invited to speak about his achievements at a commemorative seminar held on the sixth day of the festival failed to turn up — though Al-Hanager's auditorium was full to the brim. The panelists were to include Wahba's widow, actress Samiha Ayoub, as well as actresses Nadia Lutfi, Leila Eloui and Magda, actor Nur El-Sherif and fiction writer Youssef El-Qaid. The moderator, critic Ali Abu Shadi, arrived rather late to announce that the panel would not be attending since they were guests at a special festival lunch that had somehow been scheduled at the same time.

Throughout the past week, corridors have echoed with whispers, with speculations and insinuations and conspiracies. One rather weak Egyptian film, rejected by a majority of the selection committee, managed to make it into the international competition, fuelling further rumour. Meanwhile, downtown cinemas reported disappointing box office receipts, and in some cases strict security measures caused lengthy delays. As for the press screenings at Al-Hanager and the Small Hall at the Opera, these were packed to capacity.

This year's films constituted an "album" of sorts of strong female figures. There was the German-Bavarian co-production *Lea* (1995-96), the directorial debut of Ivan Fila. The Slovenian heroine of the title has lost the ability to speak after witnessing the abuse and eventual death of her mother at the hands of her sadistic father. A talented child, Lea writes poetry, has a passion for nature and music. She also has remarkable physical strength, chopping trees like the strongest of men. After her mother's death and her father's imprisonment, Lea lives with the neighbours and, 14 years later, is bought by a German man who is captivated by her beauty and sees in her physical strength a good investment. He takes her to Germany where he forcibly marries her. But, contrary to all appearances, the man himself is capable of a great deal of sensitivity; having been an officer, he is now a carpenter who makes very fine wooden instruments. Like Lea, he has suffered a great deal, but given that they have no language in common, each is unaware of what the other has been through.

The German man becomes suspicious when he finds out that Lea goes to the post office on a regular basis. Having managed to intercept her letters, he has a woman of Slovenian origin give him translations. The translator becomes totally enchanted by Lea's poems, which are addressed to her dead mother, to nature and the wild flowers she adores. The translator also lets the husband know about Lea's description of him as a glum bear incapable of smiling. Meanwhile, Lea, too, has been going through her husband's photo album, and has discovered that he was married, that his wife died during their honeymoon and that she resembled Lea. The relationship between Lea and the German man starts anew, he gives her wild flowers and buys her a violin. Soon, however, she dies of a mysterious illness — leaving the audience disgruntled with the sad ending.

In Azerbaijani director Husseyn Mekhatief's *Strange Times*, there is another violin player, this time by the name of Leila, who writes love letters she never sends and raises pigeons at home. Despite Leila's accomplishments and beauty, she devotes her life to her invalid father whom no one else accepts to nurse. Unconsciously, though, and despite her full dedication to duty, she seeks to rid herself of her father, becomes drawn to a neighbour who awaits the slightest moment of weakness in her and finally ends up resembling the father in his madness.

The Indian film *Death Sentence*, set in a village in northern India, presents three different women vis-à-vis the strictures of patriarchal society. An educated woman, a house-wife and a downtrodden working girl are given death sentences by the men of the village who see them as rebels against tradition. Another Indian film screened at the festival, *Saradi Begum* (1996), charts the biography of the famous Indian singer, her struggle against social traditions and her gradual metamorphosis into a legendary figure, culminating in her huge funeral that becomes a national event.

Should we judge by the Indian films seen at the festival, we would find a growing feminist note paralleling the emancipation of women and the greater awareness of the need to cater for the tastes of a large portion of the audience — women — particularly in a society that is fast progressing.

In Tunisian director Nouri Bouzeid's *Bint Familia* (Daughter of a Good Family), we find three examples of women drawn from an Arab Islamic society governed by the trite traditions, superstitions and contradictions which make of women's status a very lowly thing. The heroine is married to a well-off man who can provide all the status symbols but who treats her as a possession. There is her divorced friend who works very hard to provide for her two children and is in love with a Palestinian man who never appears. Then there is the Algerian woman who has escaped the massacres of the fundamentalists and is taking shelter in the house of a friend. Through the friendship between the three women — and by craftily contrasting them with the autocratic, regressive male figures in the film — Bouzeid makes some very bold statements about the status of women in the Arab world.

Plain Talk

Relations between India and Egypt are not only based on shared political and economic interests. Rather, they represent an interaction between two ancient civilisations that have, between them, enriched the cultures of many nations. Furthermore, when one talks of brotherly relations between the two countries, certain figures come to mind: Ghandi, Saad Zaghloul, Nehru and Gamal Abdel-Nasser.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of India's independence, *Sawt El-Sharq*, the Arabic monthly published by the Press Office of the Indian Embassy, has brought out a special issue.

The choice of the magazine's name is quite significant; it is not the voice of India, but of the Orient, denoting a philosophical and civilisational attitude.

The magazine is, in the words of Ambassador Sibat, "a window through which the Egyptian reader can have a look at India with its great varieties, its many languages, religions and cultures. Through it the reader will get to know its merry feasts, its folklore and music, its dancing and culinary traditions alongside its stunning scenery and many historical monuments."

It will be difficult to review the articles in this special issue yet to give a sample seems important. In an article in a series entitled "What India Means To Me", Mohamed Sid-Ahmed writes about his concept of Indian-Egyptian relations.

"It would be wrong to imagine," says Sid-Ahmed, "that Egyptian-Indian relations are the product of definite circumstances and conditions." Sid-Ahmed calls for relations capable of safeguarding our two, distinct cultural heritages, which are capable, at the same time, of allowing the values inherent in our two traditions to inform and enrich modern civilisation.

A section of the magazine is devoted to the history of the Indian liberation struggle since the 1930s and the role of the Congress Party in the development of the country and the establishment of real democracy.

Researches have proved that relations between India and Egypt go back to ancient times. According to M C Ghosh, the murals of Emperor Ashuka show that he had contacts with Ptolemy Philadelphus in 246-285 BC and that the two had exchanged ambassadors. Emperor Ashuka derived ideas for pillars from Egypt. Trade relations also existed and there was even an Indian settlement at the entrance of the Red Sea called Sukhottan, which was used as a port for the trade between Egypt and India. Relations with Egypt, and especially with Alexandria, resulted in reciprocal influences which draw the two civilisations together.

The special issue has an article on the Indian cinema which is quite becoming now that the 21st Cairo International Film Festival is in full swing. The article reveals that the first film show in India was in July 1896, only a few months after the Paris show in December 1895.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Film Festival: Programme

Thursday, 11 December

El-Hanager
9am: Strong Shit (Germany)
11.30am: Deadline in Seven Days (Armenia)
2pm: Zenab Et Le Fleuve (Lebanon)
4.30pm: Gito L'Ingrat (Burundi)

Karim I
12 noon: Fools (South Africa)
2.30pm: The Vanishing (The Netherlands)
5pm: Where Are You I Am Here (Italy)
8pm: Made Men (USA)

Metro
12 noon: Keswa, the Thin Thread (Tunisia)
2.30pm: Across the Lake (Macedonia)
5pm: L'Appartement (France)
8pm: Le Retour De Casanova (France)

Odeon I
12 noon: Just Friends (USA)
2.30pm: Isotta (Italy)
5pm: L'Appartement (France)
8pm: The Greatest Heroes (Denmark)

Odeon II
12 noon: Mother Alone (Sri Lanka)
2.30pm: Shoot the Moon (USA)
5pm: La Femme de Chambre du Titanic (France)
8pm: Angelheart (USA)

Cosmos I
12 noon: Guardian Angel (Spain)
2.30pm: Cuore Al Verde (Italy)
5pm: Sommersault in A Coffin (Turkey)
8pm: Fargo (USA)

Miami
12 noon: Lea (Germany)
2.30pm: Home for the Holidays (USA)
5pm: Death Race 2000 (USA)
8pm: Maria Electra (Greece)

Cairo
12 noon: Spanish Soldier (Spain)
2.30pm: Le Samouraï (France)
5pm: Albergo Roma (Italy)
8pm: Suspicious Minds (Canada)

Diana
12 noon: Passenger (Sweden)
2.30pm: Good Life (Spain)
5pm: Halfaouine (Tunisia)
8pm: Traka-Trak (Bulgaria)

Roxy
12 noon: Jumping at the Bone Yard (USA)
2.30pm: Asphalte Tango (Romania)
5pm: Eye Witness (Italy)
8pm: Basic Instinct (USA)

Normandy
12 noon: Good-Bye Father (Portugal)
2.30pm: Fame (USA)
5pm: Eight Days A Week (USA)
8pm: Romaine (France)

Friday, 12 December

El-Hanager
9am: L'Appartement (France)
11.30am: Le Secret de Polichinelle (France)
2pm: Mother Alone (Sri Lanka)
4.30pm: Zan Boko (Bourkina Faso)

Karim I
12 noon: Keswa, the Thin Thread (Tunisia)
2.30pm: Fame (USA)
5pm: OK Garage (UK)
8pm: Albergo Roma (Italy)

Metro
12 noon: La Nuit du Destin (Algeria)
2.30pm: The Book of Great Wishes (Poland)
5pm: Eight Days A Week (USA)
8pm: Fargo (USA)

Odeon I
12 noon: Gulls and Gangsters (Hungary)
2.30pm: Western (France)
5pm: Comme Des Rois (France)
8pm: Familia (Spain)

Odeon II
12 noon: Toubab Bi (Senegal)
2.30pm: The Earth Storm (Portugal)
5pm: Romaine (France)
8pm: La Condanna (Italy)

Cosmos I
12 noon: Jumping at the Bone Yard (USA)
2.30pm: Fools (South Africa)
5pm: La Piscine (France)
8pm: Ines De Portugal (Portugal)

Miami
12 noon: Mektoub (Morocco)
2.30pm: Trois Hommes a Abattre (France)
5pm: Sommersault in a Coffin (Turkey)
8pm: Serpent's Kiss (UK)

Cairo
12 noon: Plein Soleil (France)
2.30pm: Honeymoon (Germany)
5pm: 17 and Under (USA)
8pm: Made Men (USA)

Diana
12 noon: El-Terhal (Syria)
2.30pm: Le Samouraï (France)
5pm: Honey and Ashes (Switzerland)
8pm: Propellerblume (Switzerland)

Roxy
12 noon: L'Arche Du Desert (Algeria/France)
2.30pm: Home for the Holidays (USA)
5pm: Bent Familia (Tunisia)
8pm: Strong Shit (Germany)

Normandy
12 noon: Justice (Germany)
2.30pm: 100% Arabica (Algeria/Belgium)
5pm: Notre Histoire (France)
8pm: Basic Instinct (USA)

Saturday, 13 December

El-Hanager
9am: L'Arche du Desert (Algeria/France)
11.30am: Asphalte Tango (Romania)

Karim I
12 noon: Celluloid (Italy)
2.30pm: The Road to Melville (USA)
5pm: The Book of Great Wishes (Poland)
8pm: People Versus Larry Flint (USA)

Metro
12 noon: Why Is There a Yesterday? (Philippines)
2.30pm: Justice (Germany)
5pm: Romaine (France)
8pm: Trop Tard (Romania)

Odeon I
12 noon: Death Race 2000 (USA)
2.30pm: Fool's Paradise (USA)
5pm: Halfaouine (Tunisia)
8pm: Pink Floyd: The Wall (USA)

Odeon II
12 noon: Gito L'Ingrat (Burundi)
2.30pm: Dating the Enemy (USA)
5pm: Wolf-Tooth Necklace (Lithuania)
8pm: Mi Fai Un Favore (Italy)

Cosmos I
12 noon: Free Cuba (Italy)
2.30pm: Earth Storm (Portugal)
5pm: Notre Histoire (France)
8pm: Serpent's Kiss (UK)

Miami
12 noon: Zenab Et Le Fleuve (Lebanon)
2.30pm: Tsarevitch Alexei (Russia)
5pm: Up on the Roof (USA)
8pm: Probellerblume (Switzerland)

Cairo
12 noon: The Doll (India)
2.30pm: Gulls and Gangsters (Hungary)
5pm: Wherever You Are (Poland)
8pm: La Condanna (Italy)

Diana
12 noon: Melodie En Sous-Sol (France)
2.30pm: Steaming Milk (USA)
5pm: Sommersault in a Coffin (Turkey)
8pm: The First To Go (USA)

Roxy
12 noon: La Nuit du Destin (Algeria)
2.30pm: Sinon, Oui (France)
5pm: Sworn to Justice (USA)
8pm: Suspicious Minds (Canada)

Normandy
12 noon: Prologue (India)
2.30pm: A Cry in the Wild (USA)
5pm: La Femme de Chambre du Titanic (France)
8pm: Late Full Moon (Bulgaria)

Sunday, 14 December

Karim I
12 noon: Gulls and Gangsters (Hungary)
2.30pm: La Femme de Chambre du Titanic (France)
5pm: The Baron (Greece)
8pm: Late Full Moon (Bulgaria)

Metro
12 noon: The Vanishing (The Netherlands)
2.30pm: The Earth Storm (Portugal)
5pm: Sworn to Justice (USA)
8pm: Lawn Dogs (UK)

Odeon I
12 noon: Justice (Germany)
2.30pm: Wherever You Are (Poland)
5pm: Across the Lake (Macedonia)
8pm: Angelheart (USA)

Odeon II
12 noon: Yelema (Mali)
2.30pm: Tsarovitch Alexei (Russia)
5pm: Sworn to Justice (USA)
8pm: Albergo Roma (Italy)

Cosmos I
12 noon: Keswa, the Thin Thread (Tunisia)
2.30pm: 17 and Under (USA)
5pm: Romaine (France)
8pm: La Condanna (Italy)

Miami
12 noon: Plein Soleil (France)
2.30pm: Cuore Al Verde (Italy)
5pm: Bent Familia (Tunisia)
8pm: Fargo (USA)

Cairo
12 noon: Happy Birthday Turkey (Germany)
2.30pm: Roula (Germany)
5pm: Too Much Sleep (USA)
8pm: Le Secret de Polichinelle (France)

Diana
12 noon: The Doll (India)
2.30pm: Eleatis Xenos (Greece)
5pm: Kiss Me (Germany)
8pm: Where Are You I Am Here (Italy)

Roxy
12 noon: Melodie En Sous-Sol (France)
2.30pm: Shoot the Moon (USA)
5pm: Halfaouine (Tunisia)
8pm: Jos and the Knife (The Netherlands)

Normandy
12 noon: Western (France)
2.30pm: The First To Go (USA)
5pm: Honey and Ashes (Switzerland)
8pm: Serpent's Kiss (UK)

Diana: 17, El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727.
Normandy: 31, El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254.
Metro: 35, Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897.
Roxy: Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344.
Hanager: Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861.
Miami: 38, Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656.
Cairo: Off 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 574 5350
Karim I: 15, Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830.
Odeon I & II: 4, Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797.
Cosmos I: 12, Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537.



Good habits to last a lifetime: Mrs Mubarak with Minister of Education Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin; and visiting one of the wings at the fair

Turning the page

The Children's Book Fair, held last week in Cairo, highlighted the increasing importance of technology. **Rania Khallaf** wonders whether the bedtime story is a thing of the past

Although the International Children's Book Fair, held every year in the framework of Children's Day celebrations, has helped promote reading among school pupils, it has failed to target other children. "The effort we have exerted in developing reading habits is our main path to social change," said Mrs Suzanne Mubarak in her inauguration speech. "This year's fair displays the most modern computer technology. It is an exciting and strange world."

Mrs Mubarak was impressed by the diversity and number of books on display. Publications from 32 countries, represented by 320 Egyptian and 71 foreign publishing houses, were shown at the exhibition.

The increased dependence of some schools on educational technology was also obvious, however — a fact which further highlights the gap between privileged and poor. Many children still do not have access to primary education, while pupils in private schools have the advantage of obtaining computer skills early on. Mrs Mubarak, however, was keen to emphasise the fundamental compatibility of the printed word with late-twentieth-century technology, noting that some public libraries have been already equipped with computer terminals.

New technology, however, is not fully integrated into the educational process. Hani Abdel-Khaleq, a businessman, expressed this point of view: "The world has changed completely in the last three years. Young people must keep up with the new technology. Otherwise, this country will be completely isolated within a decade."

Adel Mustafa, a radio announcer, who had brought his two sons to the fair, said they enjoyed the visit immensely. "It is a very good opportunity to find out about new technology. My boys are bored of books. But I don't much like this new technology because it makes children lazy," he added.

For many children, however, books are still better — or at least more accessible — than computers. Twelve-year-old Marwa Mohamed said she prefers books; but "my mother encourages me to visit the public library to learn how to deal with computers." As for Yehya Ibrahim, 13, he could "barely buy three or four books". Teachers agreed that prices are very high.

Hala El-Sharouni, who presents a children's programme on TV, struck a more optimistic note: "Books and encyclopedias provide more information than any computer," she argued. Good reading habits are the gate to the world of information. And her children? They'll learn from books *and* computers this year.

A victim to blame

As the world marked International AIDS Day on 1 December, Sanaa Mohamed was fighting her own battle. **Mariz Tadros** listens to her harrowing story

When the nurse came in to take blood from Sanaa Mohamed Ahmed, 47, the doctor snapped: "Don't! Put on gloves before you touch her." Sanaa, who had been coming to the Ahmed Maher public hospital for kidney treatment, burst into tears: "Why should she put on gloves? She never has before. Is there something wrong with me? Do I have a contagious disease? Tell me, I want to know. I have a family at home." The doctor reassured her, and told her to go home. The hospital would contact her. When? she asked. "Soon, soon", he said.

Sanaa grew anxious. She was refused treatment on the dialysis machine at Ahmed Maher Teaching Hospital. Going to a private hospital or clinic was out of question. She had four children, lived in one of the tenement buildings in Madinet El-Salam (one of the new satellite cities outside Cairo) and was just managing to scrape together a living.

Sanaa went home that day. Not knowing what was wrong with her, she took every possible measure to isolate herself from her family, including her husband. A tailor, he had been working in Saudi Arabia for the preceding eleven months. When he heard the news, he broke his contract and came immediately home. "I slept in a separate room. I wouldn't eat with my children. I secluded myself almost totally from everybody. I used to scream, 'Nobody use a glass after me, nobody touch my clothes'. I was collapsing emotionally."

She was also collapsing physically. It had been almost a month since her last dialysis session and two weeks since she had been told that they would contact her. The possibility that it could be hepatitis B or C came to her mind: "Never, ever, not for a single moment did it cross my mind that I could have AIDS. I thought that only teenagers who travel abroad and behave recklessly could get AIDS. That's what the ads say: 'Beware when you travel'."

When the hospital staff did not call, her husband decided to take matters into his own hands. He was told by the doctor that her case had been transferred to the Abbasiya Fever Hospital. "By the way, don't go near your wife any more," they told him. Soon, Sanaa and her husband found themselves at the Fevers Hospital. That was when they found out what was wrong with her.

Abdel-Hamid Abaza, manager of the Ahmed Maher Teaching Hospital, confirmed that the mandatory blood tests taken before a patient commences treatment showed that Sanaa was HIV-negative, and that the last blood test taken at the hospital shows she is now HIV-positive. He insisted, however, that "this does not mean she contracted the virus in the hospital. She might have been carrying this virus before starting dialysis, and it only appeared in a routine checkup."

But Sanaa had received no previous blood transfusions. She and her husband, they insist, were both monogamous. "In the case of patients needing dialysis, they sometimes go to private clinics for treatment." Again, Sanaa insists that she went only to the Ahmed Maher Hospital for treatment. Abaza points out that the dialysis machines do not transfer the virus; as for the blood and the equipment, they are subject to rigorous control.

Dr Nasr El-Sayed, head of the AIDS department at the Ministry of Health, tells a different story. While he does not blame the hospital, El-Sayed contends that "it is difficult to determine the channel through which the virus was contracted. It could have been contaminated blood, or it could have been needles and syringes."

Sanaa has filed a lawsuit against the concerned authorities, demanding recognition that she contracted HIV in hospital. She also wants compensation for her suffering. Currently she is entitled to LE100 worth of medicine from the Ministry of Health for her kidney treatment, but no additional sum is given for medicine to ease the side effects associated with HIV, which means that Sanaa's family have to bear the burden. "I have lost my job in Saudi Arabia. I can't afford to pay for the medical fees. Every week it costs me about one hundred pounds in treatment" — about twice his weekly salary, says Sanaa's husband. He has been forced to sell family belongings to make ends meet, but admits that it is getting more difficult to meet costs every day. Apart from LE200 a year donated by the Ministry of Religious Endowments, the family receives no financial assistance. Sanaa's son has postponed enrolling at university, and sells shoes to help his family out. Because there isn't much money left after medicine bills have been paid, two of Sanaa's daughters have also started working, one as a nursery school teacher, the other at a hospital. One of them was supposed to get married last year, but has delayed her plans indefinitely.

El-Sayed, however, dismisses the need to increase Sanaa's medicine allowance: "She should be treated like any other patient with renal failure. She cannot need more than that." He points out that no special budget is set aside for HIV-positive patients. According to the Ministry of Health, there are about 450 such individuals in Egypt, while victims of full-blown AIDS number about 65.

Dr Hamdi El-Sayed, head of the Doctors' Syndicate, warns that, for every case reported, five or six go undetected. He stresses that "leakages" in the system have resulted in patients being infected in hospital. "Most of the cases can be traced back to transfusion, which is why the government now controls this procedure very strictly."

For Sanaa, who had been happily married for 28 years before disaster struck, rhetoric about the dangers of promiscuity or promises of stricter control are equally irrelevant. It has been especially devastating for Sanaa's third daughter, who is disabled and confined to a wheelchair. She was dependent upon and very close to her mother, who now can no longer associate with her as freely as before.

Although Sanaa has not yet developed all the symptoms of AIDS, she feels her strength waning. She still hopes, however, that the court will find in her favour. She hopes she will be around to hear the verdict.



Smoke in your eyes

I am not one of these headstrong people who nonchalantly disregard no parking signs, or make it a point to light up in an area where smoking is forbidden, unless of course a full ashtray beckons, proof of my predecessors' defiance. Generally, I tend to see myself as a law-abiding citizen, long past the age of pointless rebellion and rather sensitive to the rights of others. Lately, however, my feathers have been ruffled considerably by the Western winds of the hate campaign launched against smokers, which is rapidly reaching paranoid proportions.

Understandably, this campaign has caught the attention of the little people, the downtrodden, who are crushed every day by authoritative decisions which terminally influence their lives, yet remain completely beyond their control. There is precious little they can do to change the direction of world affairs — and/or their own fate — and they know it. They have therefore decided to turn a deaf ear to the economic boycott of Iraq, the genocides in Africa, the dispossession of Palestinians, the destruction of the rain forest and the non-enforcement of the ban on landmines. As a reward for their compliance, they have been given the opportunity to embark on an exhilarating power trip, waging a full-blown war, with the guarantee of coming out on the winners' side.

They no longer have to feel that they should question the actions and decisions of the great powers and their powerful institutions, pore over statistics on world poverty, or bemoan the extermination of the Asian tigers: they have been called upon to perform the greatest duty of all, a sacred purification, leading the world towards its ultimate salvation by ridding it of the supreme danger to civilisation: cigarette smoke. Forget nuclear radiation, exhaust fumes, chemical emanations, global warming and the greenhouse effect. The harm these may cause to humanity in the long run, after all, is but a fraction of that caused by a single smoker, terminally befouling the atmosphere. Why should governments worry about drug barons, international criminals and arms dealers, when they can go after tobacco companies with amazingly positive results?

While non-smokers in increasing numbers are busy purging the world of the arch-enemy, they may be expected to look benignly upon the lack of legislation on the possession of fire arms, the absence of effective measures against drunk-driving, alcoholism as a national phenomenon, the abuse of women and children, or the increasing numbers of drug peddlers around primary schools. Their children may OD, be shot accidentally by a trigger-happy friend or maimed in a car accident, driving under the influence; but at least they will have been protected effectively from second-hand smoke-related complaints such as emphysema, bronchitis and/or heart trouble.

Seriously, though: I do not object to the anti-smoking campaign; only a real fool would. Several of my close relatives have died of smoke-related ailments — or so their doctors said, and I have no reason to doubt their science. Consequently, I am convinced that smoking is hazardous to one's health and I would not dream of denying anyone the right to protect their lungs. I actually welcome any civil way of informing smokers that they are stepping out of bounds. Conspicuously displayed, artistically-designed posters announcing that "Smokers will be shot", or "Entry forbidden to smokers and skunks, trespassers will be prosecuted", are fair and acceptable warning — provided, of course, that adequate space is available, in a remote but nevertheless pleasant area, for those who still insist on playing Russian roulette with their own lives.

Surprisingly, the anti-smoking squads are not moved by such a reasonable scheme. Since few countries are actually ready to enforce the Clean Air Act, the vigilantes often find themselves without a legal foot to stand on. Consequently, they have resorted to lying in wait for their victim, hoping that, sooner or later, he/she will make a fatal mistake and emit the dreaded puff. This will immediately thrust the vigilante forward, finger pointing, eyes shining, mouth foaming, to gleefully hiss abuse at the offender. In normal life, these friendly souls self-righteously forge ahead, totally oblivious to the fact that they, too, contribute to raising pollution levels with their influenza germs or some as yet undeclared virus, which they generously disseminate, having no qualms at sneezing copiously on innocent by-standers.

It has become socially acceptable to tell a smoker off publicly. Actually, it is the in thing to do. I am now waiting for the day when it will become equally fashionable to inform perfect strangers that they have to remove themselves from the premises because they have unbearably bad breath or because their deodorant has just let them down. Then, and only then, will I feel perfectly happy to put out my cigarette when arbitrarily asked to do so.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Macaroni with white sauce

Ingredients:
One packet shell-shaped macaroni (1/2 kg)
One tbsp. crushed garlic
One litre milk
3 cartons yoghurt
2 tbsp. white flour
One cube chicken bouillon
1/2 cup parsley leaves (chopped)
Butter
Salt+white pepper+grated Greek *(roumi)* cheese

Method:
Boil the macaroni in water until cooked and strain under running water. Melt the butter and gently fry the garlic only until slightly yellowish. In another bowl, mix the milk, the flour and the yoghurt then add them to the garlic. Stir over medium heat until the mixture thickens. Add three quarters of the parsley, leaving aside the rest. Add the strained macaroni and bring to a boil, stirring all the time. Pour into a serving dish. Sprinkle the remaining parsley on top. Serve the grated cheese aside.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

The wrong end of the street

Andrew Steele discovers a venue that should be popular

It has been said, by whom I have not an inkling, but it has been said, that size isn't everything. This holds true for dining venues. What does not hold true, I'm afraid, is the axiom that location isn't everything, and it is location, I am convinced, that keeps Cento so sadly empty.

They seem to have managed everything else admirably. One passes through an oaken portal and then a smoked-glass swing door. The strains of a tinkling lounge band twitter through the speakers. The decor has a ancient Greek motif — stippled terracotta walls with embellished wainscoting. It all looks rather swish, in fact, and the bar is quite a spectacle. It winds its way across the back of the space with more than a hint of glamour, a painted backdrop of classical Greek columns plays mix and match with understated prints of the gilded spires of England. The tables had been well laid, but sadly there was no one there to crumple the linen. Empty was an adjective that sprung to mind and, aside from the late arrival of a party of yuppie bar-flies, one that lingered.

Not put off, we ordered drinks and menus, which naturally reached us with lightning speed. An eclectic selection of French-leaning cuisine and Oriental *mezze*, with a smattering of gloriously adventurous fare to titillate the post-modern palette. The *chateaubriand* with a Pernod sauce is one particularly worthy of note.

A pretty little *pannier* of bread and bread sticks was the first arrival, along with three kinds of butter, of which the anchovy variety was eminently wonderful. Regular readers will be aware of my penchant for a warm roll, and the elongated croissant-style offerings were among the best *petits pains* I have tasted this side of Christendom. Crisp exteriors coated with sea salt and cumin seeds gave way to soft, moist and doughy innards. But enough of the bread basket and onto the real stuff.

My companion's French onion soup was a delight, its necessary constituent parts all being present in perfect proportions. And blow me down, the usual rich and heavy oniony liquor was light as a feather, with a twang all its own. Gorgeous, to say the least. My stuffed mushrooms were a meeting of two herbed and garlic'd caps, skewered onto cocktail sticks, then breaded and fried. Luscious stuff.

The main courses, too, failed to disappoint. I had a *Filet Farci aux Capres et Sauce Chasseur*. An item to knock even the most hardened of *gourmands*' socks off. Meat to die for that had undergone a gentle stuffing with minced and marinated capers, with a classic *Chasseur* that was full of piquancy and loveliness. The simpler *Penne Putanesca* was also toothsome, a rich tomato, caper and anchovy sauce clinging to the tubes of pasta like a good ragout should.

So good was it all, we decided to share a dessert. And the final coup de grâce was plonked on the table with some finesse. A caramel and hazelnut ice cream. Correctly light on the caramel but laden with nuts. Blissful end to blissful meal, all said. The price was middling, at LE171 for a very substantial dinner for two with four local Stellas. Cento needs your support. Go there.

Cento, 100 Hegaz Street (after Midan Heliopolis), Heliopolis
Tel: 2452142

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

Across
1. Number of days by which solar year exceeds lunar year (5)
6. Progressed (4)
10. African country (4)
14. Gateway of Japanese Shinto shrine (5)
15. Plutonic rock matter (4)
16. Excellent, 2 wds (4)
17. Famous lady designer (10)
19. Seethe (4)
20. Regal initials (3)
21. County of Maidstone (4)
22. Gear, handle (6)
24. Dressed (4)
25. Mr Pound (4)
26. One type of hen (5)
28. Bald (8)
32. Agreements; holds together (5)
33. Threefold; gull type bird (4)
34. Girl's name (4)
35. Pertaining to ear (4)
36. Scandinavian parliament; object (5)
37. Burden (4)
38. Scarf; window frame (4)
39. Personal pronoun (4)
40. Counterparts; clones (5)
41. Impostors (8)
43. Footprint; tow boat from bank (5)
44. Mechanical repetition (4)
45. Small kangaroo (4)
46. N. American deer (6)
49. Italian monetary unit (4)
50. Song in two parts (3)
53. Ids (4)
54. Musical instrument (10)
57. God of war (4)
58. Helper (4)
59. Feudal lord; under command (5)
60. Tardy (4)
61. Wine sediment (4)
62. Trees, jumbled (5)

Down
1. Engrave (4)
2. Pauperised (4)
3. Astute; curve on inner part of foot (4)
4. Congress of Industrial organisations, abb. (3)
5. Itches; delights (7)
6. Secretory organ (5)
7. Go into hysterics (4)
8. First lady (3)
9. ..Mathilda (8)
10. US band leader (11)
11. Buckle; connect (4)
12. The indigo plant (4)
13. Efface (4)
18. Get wind; understand; listen (4)
23. Music: arranged by, abb. (3)
24. Actress Tula Finklea as she is now known (11)
25. Acquires; gleans (5)
26. Anglo Indian pot used for drinking and ablution (5)
27. Aromatic herb (5)
28. Inheritors (5)
29. Eral (5)
30. Cowered; produced young prematurely (5)
31. Impudence (4)
32. Pear (4)
33. Yonder (5)
36. Arbitrarily; dogmatically (8)
40. Dark syrup (7)
42. Small child (3)
43. Mouldings at base of column (4)
45. Jitterbugs; boogie-woogies (5)
46. Prosperity; flesh scar caused by whip (4)
47. Site of Taj Mahal (4)
48. Versifier (4)
49. Put cargo on board ship (4)
50. Maker (4)
51. Impel; drive (4)
52. Works of 48 Down (4)
55. Recline (3)
56. Smite (3)

Last week's solution





A genteel liberation

Huda Sha'rawi died on 12 December 1947, 50 years ago tomorrow. **Fayza Hassan** examines her legacy and wonders what, if anything, is left of it half a century later

"Towards the end of her life, Huda Sha'rawi began to write her memoirs," writes Margot Badran in the preface to *Harem Years, the Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist*, 1879-1924 (translated, edited and introduced by Margot Badran, Virago Press Limited, 1986), the incomplete autobiography of Huda Sha'rawi. "Writing about her life during the harem years was a final unveiling. It can be seen as Huda Sha'rawi's final feminist act."

Few symbolic acts have been as dramatic as Sha'rawi's removal of her face veil at the Cairo train station in 1923, as she and Ceza Nabarawi were returning from an international feminist conference in Rome. Ceza Nabarawi emulated her older companion at once, shedding her own veil, while the welcoming delegation of (veiled) women broke into loud applause. Though there are some doubts as to the exact circumstances surrounding this act of defiance, it remains, nevertheless, one which has fired the imagination of women seeking their liberation and represents, for feminists, an historical landmark in their struggle towards empowerment.

Today, however, middle-class Egyptian women, who represent a strong majority, have once more donned the veil, of their own accord this time. As for the house of the founder of Egyptian feminism, it was one of the first to go at the beginning of the revolution, in a clear indication that Sha'rawi's brand of nationalism and feminism had become suspect, tainted by her place in society and natural association with the elite. Today, it is a parking lot.

Does the disappearance of these very visible aspects of Sha'rawi's reign diminish the scope and influence of this first Western-style women's movement, one she led with such courage and enthusiasm?

Towards the end of Khedive Ismail's reign, and during that of Tewfik, the most Europeanised segments of society began to speak out in favour of limited change in the situation of secluded women. It is the opinion of some historians that, had Ismail not bowed to the desires of the *ulama*, Egyptian Muslim women would have been emancipated as early as the middle of the 19th century. As it was, however, women themselves remained timid in their attempts at rebelling against sequestration, which, with veiling, was a mark of prestige and status.

Badran contends that the two practices had nothing to do with Islam, but were rather connected with the customs of Mediterranean societies and the honour of men, and that "in Egypt, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, Jewish, Christian and Muslim women in the cities all veiled". Esther Wissa, however, recounts that, in March 1919, she went with her aunt, Mrs Khayat, and another Coptic lady, to "a certain house in the Rue Kasr El-Nil." There, they were met by "an imposing lady who looked at us and said 'What, where are the hats?'," expressing her disappointment at the fact that so few Coptic women had turned up for the demonstration that was to follow. "By hats," explains Esther Wissa, Huda Sha'rawi "meant the Coptic women who had been emancipated forty years earlier." (In Hanna F Wissa: *Assiout, the Saga of an Egyptian Family*, The Book Guild, London, 1994).

In an article by-lined A.H.H. and published in the October-November 1926 issue of *L'Egyptienne*, the monthly magazine of which Huda Sha'rawi was the founder and Ceza Nabarawi the editor-in-chief, the author readily acknowledged the ground-breaking role of several pioneering feminists. Among those were "Aicha Hanem Teymour" (Aisha Al-Taymouriya), who had surpassed her male contemporaries in literary talent, followed by "Doctor Galila", who "courageously embraced the medical profession", and by the poetess and satyrist Zubeida Maghribiya. The writer confesses little is known about the life and activities of this last, remarkable trailblazer, except that she was the first woman to frequent, unveiled, the (all-male, of course) banquets and salons of *the intellectual elite.*

Another woman worthy of acknowledgment was Princess Nazli Fazil, also said to be active in promoting women's emancipation. She opened the doors of her palace to distinguished men like Sheikh Mohamed Abdou, Qassem Bey Amin, Saad Zaghloul, Ibrahim Helbawi and others. During her soirées, highly intellectual topics were discussed, and the idea of constituting an Egyptian elite in which educated women would be permitted to move freely was suggested with some seriousness.

It is in this context that Qassem Amin was encouraged to publish *The Emancipation of Women* and *The New Woman*. The former volume unleashed a storm of protests, and the *ulama* soon met to consider an adequate condemnation of the author and his revolutionary ideas. Sheikh Mohamed Boulaki was chosen to draft a biting response, though the choice was surprising in view of the fact that the sheikh's own children, both boys and girls, had attended foreign schools and enjoyed the highest standards of education. Whether Boulaki was the wisest of choices was soon to be proven a moot point, however, as Qassem Amin's book did not gain any measure of popularity, not even among his friends and associates. Clearly, the time was not ripe for the majority of upper-class women to throw open the doors of the harems; nor were the ideas that Qassem Amin expounded of great interest to the poorer segments of society, who probably remained unaware of the furore.

At any rate, women's emancipation, for Huda Sha'rawi and her followers, was not a social issue in the wider sense we would give to the term today. Such a liberation, they believed, could only come from one direction: Europe. France in particular had pride of place in their thoughts of freedom, but, in any case, any European woman's lot was, they contended, much superior to that of her Egyptian counterparts. In an outline of women's attempts to break free of their bonds, A.H.H. recounts that, one day, Ibrahim Helbaoui and his friend Ibrahim El-Laqani met Jamaleddin Al-Afghani — another champion of women's freedom — in the Gezireh. Suddenly an Englishwoman on horseback rode by them. "Having quickly glanced at her," wrote A.H.H., "Gamaleddin asked El-Laqani: 'What is your dearest wish?' 'To have a wife similar to this one,' said El-Laqani at once. And *Sheikh Gamaleddin showed that he was deeply satisfied with the answer.*"

Malek Hefni Nassef, aka Bahethat El-Badeya, was another heroine whom the women's movement was keen to claim as one of its own. She was the first young woman from the ruling class to embrace a teaching career, a move which, until that moment, had been frowned upon; but in 1908 she rose in defence of the veil, an attitude which put her at odds with her bolder sisters.

The women's movement was gaining adepts, meanwhile, with the adherence of famous names like Lutfi El-Sayed. In *Al-Garida*, El-Sayed published several articles written by Abdel-Hamid Hamdi, who had attacked the detractors of Qassem Amin in a public speech delivered at the Helouan Casino. For a long time, this speech served as a sort of manifesto for the movement. In 1915, Hamdi founded the weekly *El-Lefour*, which published contributions from Taha Hussein, Mustafa Abdel-Raziq, Mansour Fahmi and Mohamed Hussein Heikal, all champions of the new ideas.

By 1919, Egypt was in turmoil, ready to shake off all the bonds of oppression at once. Huda Sha'rawi rose to the occasion, organising the first women's demonstration, which, according to Esther Wissa, was attended by more than a thousand women. In 1920, she was instrumental in the creation of the Wafdist Women's Central Committee, of which she was elected president; then, when the 1923 Constitution was promulgated, restricting suffrage to males, she founded and became president of the Egyptian Feminist Union. During the same year, she lead the EFU delegation to the international feminist meeting in Rome and, upon her return, cast off her veil publicly. In 1924, she guided the women who picketed the opening of parliament. The same year, she resigned from the presidency of the Wafdist Women's Central Committee to concentrate on her responsibilities at the head of the feminist movement, a role in which she remained active until her death in 1947.

It is against the particular political, social and intellectual background of this period that one must view Huda Sha'rawi's history and evaluate the influence that she may — or may not — have had in improving Egyptian women's status and conditions in their particular communities.





Clockwise from top left: the destruction of Huda Sha'rawi's villa on the corner of Qasr El-Nil Street; made in Paris: portrait of a lady; the statues in the garden look on as demolition work proceeds apace; the parking lot that has replaced this pioneering feminist's neo-Islamic villa; Huda Sha'rawi's portrait by Bahgory

The life of an upper-class Egyptian woman at the beginning of the 20th century: extracts from Huda Sha'rawi's *Harem Years, the Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist*

A charitable cause

"...A few days later the Princess [Ain Al-Hayat] sent for me... When I arrived she received me in bed. 'I understood your reasons for not attending the reception for Lady Cromer [the opening of a dispensary established by the late Lady Cromer]. It is, indeed, shameful that we in Egypt do not undertake such projects, ourselves. It is our duty to be at the head of charitable works in Egypt. I intend to sponsor a dispensary.' I praised her plan and confessed that I had declined to take part in the entreprise headed by an Englishwoman, however much I appreciated the charitable works of Europeans, and notwithstanding the participation of other Egyptian women...Before I left she confided, 'I am anxious to encourage the princesses of the royal family and Egyptian women to co-operate in works that will serve the nation and humanity.' She insisted I helped her achieve that goal and I pledged my support. "The following week I received an invitation from Princess Ain Al-Hayat to come to her palace on Shariah Al-Dawawin for the first meeting about the dispensary. Many princesses and Egyptian women attended and, after talk over tea, they elected a committee headed by Princess Nazli Halim, with Princess Ain Al-Hayat as treasurer and other princesses as secretaries, as well as Mme Fouquet. We each pledged at least fifty pounds to launch the project. Princess Ain Al-Hayat announced that Her Highness the Walda Hanim (the mother of Abbas Helmi) would make a generous bequest... the Khedive Abbas Helmi and the Wife of the Khedive would likewise give their support...We rented a modest building on Shariah Baramuni in the populous Muhammad Ali section of Cairo. We commissioned the architect Mahmoud Pasha Fahmi to convert the building into a place to house the dispensary and later a school. Members of the committee took charge of furnishing the building: Princess Nazli Halim provided forty bolts of white muslin for sheets and bed covers; I donated the beds; my brother gave the desks; and various others took care of additional needs."

A declaration of independence

"When I entered Chalon, the staff and clientele were visibly taken aback by this veiled apparition and her retinue... We were led to the department for women's apparel, behind a pair of screens hastily erected to obscure me from view... A saleswoman was to wait on me and to bring whatever I wished. One of the young assistants — amazed by the proceedings — asked about me and my family. Said Agha attacked her with ferocious looks and immediately complained about her impertinence to the manager. She trembled in fear while the other assistants covered their smiles with their hands. The manager was about to dismiss the young assistant then and there. I intervened, however, and asked him not to. I was thoroughly ashamed of the whole scene. Whenever I went shopping the procedure would be repeated all over again until one day I finally persuaded my mother to accompany me. She was then quick to see the advantages of shopping in person. Not only was there a wide range of goods to choose from, but there was money to be saved through wise spending."

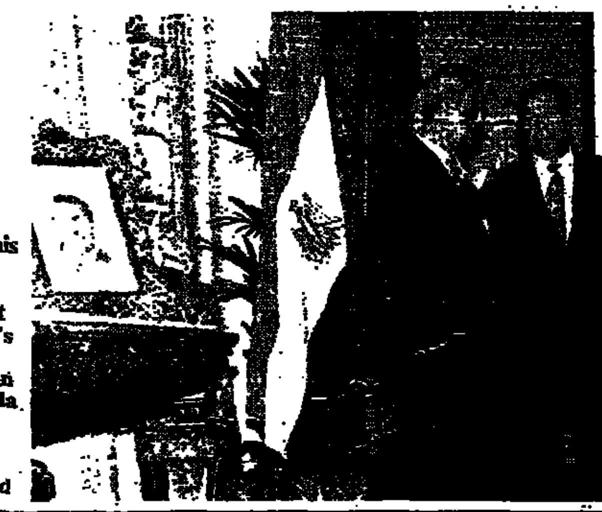
From London and Paris:

Egyptian Ambassador to London hosts 150 leading media, financial and advertising personalities from BBC, CNN, MBC, *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek International*, *Herald Tribune*, Reuters, *Middle East Economic Digest*, *Media International*

International Advertising Association Congress to convene in Cairo next May



Egyptian Ambassador to the United Kingdom Adel El-Gazzar and his wife, during a welcoming reception held at the ambassador's residence. Also pictured is Hasan Hamdi, Mrs. Lola Zaklama, Galal Zaki, Hazem Deraa and Abdel-Aziz Farid



Mr Adel El-Gazzar, Egyptian ambassador to the United Kingdom, and Mr Hasan Hamdi, head of the IAA Cairo Congress' Organising Committee, during the welcoming reception that was held at the ambassador's residence



Galal Zaki, secretary-general of the Congress, explaining the activities of the upcoming Congress

photos: Farouk Bondouq

LONDON: AL-AHRAM - A welcoming reception was held by the Egyptian Ambassador Adel El-Gazzar last Thursday to outline the activities of the forthcoming International Advertising Association Congress, to be held in Cairo from 10-13 May 1998.

The reception was attended by more than 150 leading personalities in the fields of advertising, media and economy, which included top-ranking members of the International Advertising Association's (IAA) London office; a large number of British and international businessmen; the ambassadors of Morocco and the UAE; head of the British-Arab Chamber of Commerce Abdel-Karim Mudarris; Egyptian businessman Shafik Gabr; Mr Maher El-Holugi, an Egyptian businessman residing in London and Karim El-Holugi, head of MEC-ITE Co which recently started business with Cairo.

The ambassador and his wife welcomed members of the Congress' organising committee, which included Hasan Hamdi, Lola Zaklama, Hazem Deraa, Galal Zaki and Dalia Abdel-Fattah. Among the guests attending the reception:

1- From *Newsweek International*
Jonathan Canning
David Joe
Peter Airbee
2- Reuters
Leslie Adler
Sophie Walker
3- *Time*
Mark Simpson
4- CNN
Julia Terri
Martin Wright
5- *Middle East Economic Digest*
Richard Mayer
6- BBC World Service
Affaf Galal
Hela Murad
7- MBC
Hela Amran
8- *Media International*
Charlotte Carlsten
Mark Tungette
9- *International Herald Tribune*
Alistar McKewan
Rebecca Gazzenz
10- BBC World Wide Publishing
Keith Hirst

Butros Ghali to give keynote speech at the IAA Congress in Cairo

DR BUTROS Ghali, secretary-general of the Francophone Organisation and former secretary-general of the United Nations has agreed to give the keynote address at the 36th IAA Congress which will convene in Cairo this May under the auspices of President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak.

Dr Ghali sent his acceptance to attend the conference to Hasan Hamdi, head of the Congress' organising committee, during a meeting in Paris at the UNESCO headquarters. Attending the meeting was Mrs. Lola Zaklama, vice-president of the *IAA*.



Dr Butros Ghali, and to his left Hasan Hamdi, Galal Zaki, and to his right Mrs. Lola Zaklama

900 media, advertising and economic personalities from Europe and Africa at the London Hilton

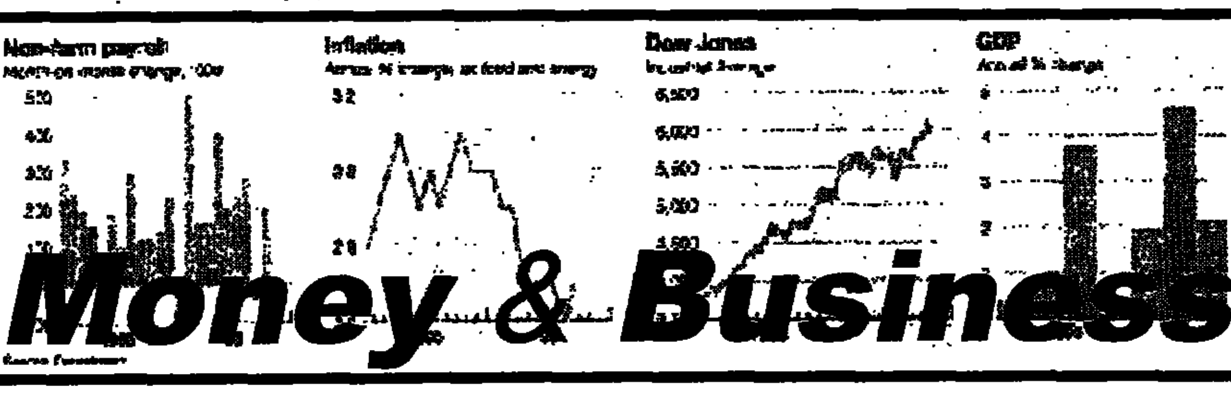
ONE OF the highlights of the Christmas dinner party organised by the IAA's branch in England, attended by the Egyptian Ambassador to the United Kingdom Adel El-Gazzar and nearly 900 figures from the fields of media, advertising and economy from Europe and Africa, was Egyptian artist Ibrahim Rady drawing the names of guests in hieroglyphics on papyrus, much to the delight of those in attendance. The party was held at the London Hilton.



(From left to right) Mrs. Lola Zaklama; head of the Congress; Galal Zaki, secretary-general of the Congress; Egyptian Ambassador to the United Kingdom Adel Gazzar; Egyptian artist Ibrahim Rady, who entertained attendees by writing their names in hieroglyphics; Hasan Hamdi, head of the IAA Cairo Congress' organising committee; Dr Omar Abdel-Samie, assistant editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* and head of *Al-Ahram*'s London bureau; and Dalia Abdel-Fattah, executive director of the Congress

What after the ISO 9000?

THE QUALITY Management Institute of the American University in Cairo is rendering its services in the form of a series of training courses on the necessary skills required to apply the quality system ISO 9000, and the quality system ISO 14000, in addition to several other courses intended for companies keen on preparing themselves for what lies beyond the ISO. Egyptian companies wishing to succeed are striving to reach a high level of production quality. Working according to ISO standards is but a first step in achieving international success.



AUC to host engineering conference

HOSTED and organised by the Engineering Department of the American University in Cairo, the 22nd International Conference for Computers and Industrial Engineering will be held at the Marriott Hotel from 20-22 December.

About 250 papers will be presented at the conference dealing with matters of major concern to the Egyptian industry like planning, controlling production systems, and rationalising the cost of production, information systems and decision-making.

For further information please call 3575356.

ACITEX attracts major sponsors and over 80 top-line companies —Additional exhibition space available for a limited time—

OVER the past five years, the Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX) has achieved renowned success, a success that can be attributed to the sponsors which have lent their support to the exhibition in the past, in addition to the companies exhibiting their products and services. Sponsors of the forthcoming 6th ACITEX, to be held on 18-21 February 1998, include: IBM, National Bank of Egypt, Computer Consultancy Group, ETS, ProTrade, Banque Misr, Xerox, and Newlogi International.

As for exhibiting companies at this year's ACITEX, they include: AMAC, Apple Line, ATS, Auto Computer, Better Business Co, Cairo Computer, CeBIT, CompuScience, Computer and Engineering World, CompuTrack, Computerland, Crystal Mind, CSA, CSS, DellTex, Dimension, EgiTech, Egypt Computers, El-Arabiyya for Electronic Services, El-Badr for Computers and Electronics, El-Ilmiyya for Computers, El-Shorouq for Trade, El-Tawil for International Trade, Electronic and Computer Consultancy Group, Fay for Computers, Foda Computers, Gama Electronics Co, Glory Tech Databank Computers, Horizon, Inigrack for Computers and Telecommunications, International Computer and Services Co, International Electronics Centre, KME Computools, Laser Egypt, Lingand Systems Egypt, Lingand Trade Centre, Mega-Group for Export and Import, Minif Trading House, Multi-Media Egypt, OFIS Computer, Powerline Egypt, Ram for Trade and Computer Systems, Robitech Systems, Sakhr Al-Ahram Computer, Service Co., Softline, SYSTEMS, Tag Computer Centre, Tri-Star, UBC for Trade and Engineering, UniComp and United Computers.

Due to the increased demand for exhibition space, a limited amount of additional exhibition space is now available for rent by companies wishing to display their products and services at ACITEX. It is worth mentioning that as this year's ACITEX is being held at the Cairo International Conference Centre, the additional space will not in any way hinder visitors' freedom of movement.

At the same time and location as ACITEX, the 6th Artificial Intelligence Conference will be taking place, with a large number of academics from Egypt, the United States, England, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Japan, Turkey and Greece participating in the conference's activities.

Each year the Ahram Management and Computer Centre (AMAC) has a leading role in the exhibition, compiling visitor data and statistics with the aim of helping organisers plan future exhibitions and conferences.

Representatives from foreign exhibitions will be on hand at ACITEX, including those from SYSTEMS in Munich, and CeBIT in Hannover, considered to be among the largest international exhibitions in the field of computers and information technology. The presence of representatives of these two exhibitions will go a long way in putting ACITEX on the list of important exhibitions. To reserve the limited additional exhibition space, please call 3391071 or fax 3941866.

Egyptian Cultural Week in India

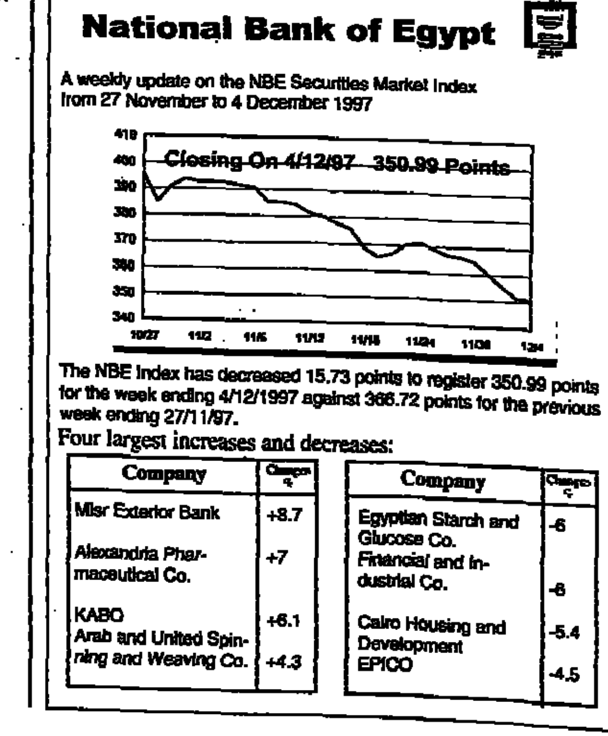
BOMBAY, the commercial capital of India, witnessed an Egyptian Cultural Week. Among the activities that took place were Egypt's participation in Bombay's first International Film Festival, where it was represented by three films: *Sareq Al-Farah*, *Afareet Al-Asfalt*, and *Tuyour Al-Zallam*. Other events included a performance by the well-known Tanoura folkloric troupe, and an Arabic music group that performed in the largest theatre in the state of Maharastra.

Azza Nassar, Ambassador at the Egyptian General Consulate in Bombay, said that the events of the Egyptian Cultural Week were extremely successful, with its events attended by a number of Indian officials, including the prime minister and governor of Maharastra, in addition to the minister of culture. A number of leading businessmen and celebrities were also on hand to enjoy the festivities.



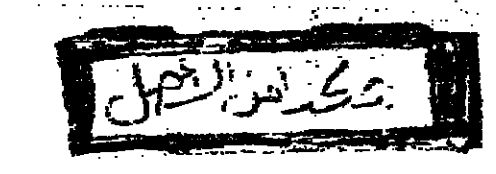
Azza Nassar

It is worth mentioning that Bombay has the second largest cinema industry in the world, and it is for this reason that Bombay is affectionately known as "Bollywood".



Company	Change %
Misr Exterior Bank	+8.7
Alexandria Pharmaceutical Co.	+7
KABO	+6.1
Arab and United Spinning and Weaving Co.	+4.3

Company	Change %
Egyptian Starch and Glucose Co.	-6
Financial and Industrial Co.	-6
Cairo Housing and Development	-5.4
EPICO	-4.5



From Egypt with gloves

For the fourth time in a row, the home boys snaffled first place in the Egyptian International Boxing Championship. How do they do it? **Abeer Anwar** was there to watch the rout



Egypt's Nader El-Sayed and a blow to Saudi Mabdi Ali's face

photo: Aref Saadeddin

The indoor halls of the Olympic Centre at Maadi were the scene of an "un-mitt-igated" victory by the two Egyptian teams — known jocularly as "A" and "B" — who romped off with, respectively, first and second places in this year's International Boxing Championship, forcing Algeria back into third place. Team A accumulated 5 gold medals, 2 silver and 3 bronze, while Team B was busy stockpiling 2 gold, 4 silver and 3 bronze. Algeria, in comparison, had only managed to lay their hands on 1 gold, 3 silver and 1 bronze by the end of the final bout.

"Although a number of experienced Egyptian boxers were missing, as they are taking part right now in the Military World Championship in the USA, the rest of the boxers were able to compensate for their colleagues' absence and keep the title for the fourth year in a row," commented Dr Abdel-Aziz Ghoneim, technical manager of the national team as well as of the A team. Not only that, but the home team also managed to steal the 17th Arab Boxing Cup which was being held simultaneously.

The competition was not without its surprises. Egypt's world-ranked boxer Amr Mustafa was beaten in the +91kg category by his teammate, Mohamed Reda, who is both older than Mustafa and significantly less experienced than him. "I was badly injured in my arm and I could not complete the round. That is why I lost," Mustafa protested. But insiders say the real reason for his poor performance was that he was absent for both the preparatory training and the closed camp that was held before this event. Then Ukraine's Oleg Kirjukin, bronze medalist in Atlanta in the 48kg category, was beaten by a wide margin on points — 7/14 — by the Egyptian boxer Eid Fekry in the 51kg category. After the match, the Ukrainian coach, Valerij Cherenkov commented, "It was a surprise that he lost such a match, but the Egyptians had studied the way at the closed camp we held with them in preparation for a championship that was due to be held in Ukraine, but was finally cancelled. That is why we decided to take part in Egypt's International Championship, but it was too late to conceal our cards because we had already played them." Eid Fekry, for his part, was extremely happy: "I was sure that I was going to just be his punching bag, but I was lucky enough to avoid the whiplash and I was able to beat him."

In the 17th Arab Individual Boxing Championship, Egypt did not dominate the competition, but still managed to take three gold medals: Soliman Mohamed won in the 48kg category, Essam Mustafa in the 51kg category, and Mustafa Farouk in the 75kg category.

Commenting on the Championship, Dr Ismail Hamed, head of the Egyptian and Arab Federation and member of the International Amateur Federation, said: "I am very satisfied because a greater number of Arab countries than ever before have taken part in the event and because the technical level of the event has improved. As for the standard of the Egyptian competitors, they performed very well and were able to hold onto the title for a fourth consecutive year."

The Syrian coach, Hesham Abu Eid, expressed his great happiness at participating in such an event. "The hospitality of the Egyptians," he said, "has refuted all the rumours that this is a country that is full of terrorism and insecurity. We feel that we are at home." The same sentiment was echoed by the Ukrainian coach, who said that he felt very safe walking alone in the streets of Cairo, and that people were all the time coming up to him to welcome him.

Algeria's Mohamed Alawi won the El-Tayeb El-Hewashi Cup for the best competitor, the Tunisian team won Dr Emara's Cup for team spirit and Saudi Arabia won the Faisal Ben Fahd Cup for Fair Play. And the Championship Cup went, of course, to Egypt.

East End boys

Was Gert Muller a mullah? Is Masayuki Okano the natural son of Gary Lineker? These and all your other questions answered in this, the second instalment of our series profiling the nations who have qualified for next year's World Cup, as **Inas Mazhar** takes us on an exclusive journey through the locker rooms of Asia

Iran

After looking like a dead cert for France 98, Iran suffered a major collapse near the end of the Asian qualification rounds, failing to win any of their last six matches. They were forced into a playoff with Japan, which they managed to lose 3-2 in extra time, as a result of which they found themselves in a two-leg playoff with Australia. Again, the Iranians took advantage of the opportunity to see how near to the edge they could go without falling over once and for all. After drawing 1-1 at home, they went on to trail 2-0 in Melbourne with only 15 minutes remaining, before snatching two goals before the end of full time. If their skills are certain, by the end of the saga many were wondering what exactly their motivation might be. But by that time, a 2-2 draw was good enough to send them to France. Their present coach Valdir Vierra only took charge in time for their playoff games, after the entire coaching staff was sacked following the dismal 2-0 fiasco in Qatar. Vierra is now expecting to be signed on long-term following the team's qualification.

Japan

Japan is a first-time qualifier, having been very close in 1986 only to lose to South Korea in the final qualifying round. The Japanese have two star players, former Series A forward Kazu Miura and Brazilian forward Wagner Lopes. Japan appeared to be on its way to missing the big show again after losing at home to the Koreans. But a 2-0 victory in Seoul and the 5-1 crushing of Kazakhstan clinched a playoff with Iran and substitute Masayuki Okano's extra time golden goal gave the Japanese a 3-2 victory (see above) and a place in the finals.

Saudi Arabia

The Saudis led by German coach Otto Plister hope to match or better their 1994 debut performance when they reached the second round after a surprise victory over Belgium. They looked impressive during qualifying with a 5-1-0 record in round one and 4-2-2 in round two, although only eight second round goals from eight games seems to indicate a lack of goalscoring power.

South Korea

Co-host of the 2002 World Cup with Japan, the Koreans qualified this year for the fourth time, although they are still to make it past the first round of the competition. After a 3-1-0 performance in the first qualifying round, they were unbeaten in the second and had already clinched a place in the finals well before finishing with a 6-1-1 record. Coached by Cha-Bum-Kun, Korea has a lively striker in Choi Yong-Soo.

Into the lions' den

Despite a screening system that effectively precludes any big surprises, at least in terms of football, the 1998 World Cup first-round draw has unwittingly turned up one interestingly "political" fixture, pitting the USA against Iran. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** ventures down to the ringside to listen to the caged beasts growl

Last week the draw was made for the 1998 World Soccer Cup, the last World Cup of the century and the most coveted trophy in sports. The groups were selected at Marseille's Stade Velodrome only six months before the show is set to begin on 10 June when Brazil kick off against Scotland. Thirty-two teams will be chasing the same dream through eight groups. The quest will take them through 10 French cities and will take more than four weeks, finishing on 12 July in the same place as it started — the new 80,000-capacity Stade de France at Saint-Denis in the suburbs of Paris.

This time the draw did not create a Group of Death of the same intensity as has been seen in some past championships. However, it has produced plenty of intriguing and politically-charged combinations. Five of the powerhouse teams are already looking forward to great things. With two teams qualifying from each of the eight groups, Brazil, Italy, France, Germany and Argentina should be laughing all the way to the second round. However, England, Bulgaria and the United States, who have been less fortunate, might well be booking early flights home.

Group A

Defending champions and four-times title-holders Brazil are confident that Scotland, Morocco and Norway won't be strong enough to prevent them making the last 16. Of their three opponents, only Morocco has ever made it to the second round, in 1986. The Scots haven't progressed beyond the first round in seven attempts, while Norway is appearing in the finals for only the third time. While the opening game may not be as glamorous as some we have seen before, it will offer an early glimpse of Ronaldo, Brazil's shining star, who many see as a fit successor to Pele.

Group B

The Italians were runners-up as recently as 1994, but they had to struggle through the playoffs to make the finals. Now they will be relieved to see only Chile, Cameroon and Austria come between them and the second round. Cameroon are only a shadow of the team that made it to the quarter-finals in 1990. Chile is the weakest of the five South American teams, and Austria hasn't been in the last four since 1954.

Group C

Host nation France has the home advantage, but even without it they should be too strong for debutant South Africa, Saudi Arabia and Denmark. The South Africans, who won the African Nations Cup, are in a strong position to take advantage of the strain that high expectations are likely to impose on French coach Aime Jacquet and his team. But the Danes, even when Brian Laudrup is on form, are unpredictable, the Saudis have never made it past the first round and French players of the calibre of Youri Djorkaeff and Zinedine Zidane should prove strong enough to see them off.

Group D

There may not be a group that really deserves to be called a Group of Death, but group D comes quite close with Spain, Nigeria, Bulgaria and the unpredictable Paraguay. Bulgaria was a semi-finalist in 1994, its best ever result, and will again be seen as the underdog in the fight against not only the Spaniards but also the Nigerians, who won the Olympic Gold medal last year in a high-quality competition at Atlanta.

Group E

As well as being neighbours, the Dutch and the Belgians are frequently matched as World Cup opponents, too. In the 1994 finals in the United States, Belgium edged out the Netherlands 1-0, yet the Dutch beat their rivals twice in the qualifying rounds for these finals. Now they meet again at Saint-Denis, just outside Paris, on 13 June, with matches against Mexico and South Korea to follow. The Mexicans made it to the quarterfinals when they hosted the 1970 and 1986 finals, but have made little impact on their travels. The South Koreans, meanwhile, have made four appearances yet never survived the first round.

Group F

Group F certainly carries the strongest political undertones, as Germany and Yugoslavia fancy their chances of outplaying both the United States and Iran. The Americans, anxious to give the game a higher profile back home in the face of huge competition from football, baseball, basketball and ice hockey, are desperate to get further than the second round. That will be tough against a German squad that, despite its age, has proved repeatedly successful and a rapidly-improving Yugoslavia, who with some real stars in their line-up, such as Real Madrid's Predrag Mijatovic and AC Milan's Dejan Savicevic, will be hoping to make their mark in the finals. As for the United States vs. Iran, Hank Steinbrecher, secretary-general of the US Soccer Federation, called it the "mother of all games". Iranian Federation President Dariush Mostafavi said his players would not think of politics. "For Iran, the most important thing is fair play," said Mostafavi. The eyes of the entire world will be on that match.

Group G

England, angered at not being seeded, will have to beat Romania and Colombia if it is to make the last 16. They also have Tunisia to deal with, who were runner-up in the African Nations Cup last year. Romania had the best record of all 32 qualifying teams, having won nine games and tied only one, and the squad looks at least as strong as in 1994, when they reached the last eight. Colombia, meanwhile, will be hoping to make up for a weak performance in '94 when they were eliminated during the first round.

Group H

Argentina, a veteran of 12 appearances, now faces three first-time qualifiers, Japan, Jamaica and Croatia. Yet these newcomers should not be too easily discounted. Jamaica can field four pros from the English league while Croatia has some big stars such as Lazio's Alen Boksic, Alen Suker of Real Madrid and former Real and Barcelona hero Robert Prosinecki.

Champion of two continents

Despite losing the first leg of their Afro-Asian final to South Korea's Yohang, Zamalek nevertheless managed to find what it takes to win the second leg 1-0 and snatch the trophy on points. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** was far from disappointed

By the skin of their teeth, Zamalek claimed the Afro-Asian Cup last Friday when they defeated Yohang of South Korea 1-0. The Egyptians had previously suffered a 2-1 defeat in the first leg which was played in South Korea. They might well have lost the second leg too, had they not surprised their opponents with an early goal in the 19th minute scored by Mohamed Sabri. Thanks to a strong defense and the prayers of some 80,000 spectators who had packed into Cairo Stadium, goalkeeper Nader El-Sayed managed to hold off Yohang's desperate attempts to score until full time, and Zamalek took the cup on points.

Yohang were a very tough proposition, and beating them, even at home, was certainly not an easy task for Zamalek. According to many commentators, Yohang are very technically adept, and indeed the whole match was distinguished by the high standards of skill on display. The only two yellow cards shown by Tunisian referee Murad El-Da'mi went to Zamalek's Ismail Youssef and Essam Marei. The Tunisian arbiters also proved very skilled and were able to keep a potentially explosive match well under control. Even the Egyptian spectators who are famous for their emotional volatility, which at times descends into hooliganism at decisive matches, behaved themselves in a most civilised manner.

The match was attended by such distinguished guests as the executive president of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, Dr. Abdel-Moneim Emara, President of the Egyptian Football Federation Samir Zaher, and head of the Zamalek club Kamal Darwish. They were rewarded with an extraordinary first 19 minutes, during which Zamalek gave a spectacular attacking performance that escalated constantly until the final climax of Mohamed Sabri's cannon ball into the back of Yohang's net.

Predictably, after such a daunting goal, Zamalek relaxed a little, allowing the South Koreans to mount several clever attacks. One of these almost ended in a goal for Yohang, but fortunately the tragedy was averted, and this proved to be the shock which woke Zamalek up again. Nevertheless the South Koreans still had the upper hand, especially after their coach substituted two players and gave the team new instructions. At several points Yohang's ceaseless attacking brought the Zamalek fans a few nail-biting moments, but they managed to reach half-time with the one goal lead intact.

Faced with such a display of aggression, some commentators said that the substitutions made by Zamalek's coach were pointless. Sabri, who had scored the team's only goal, was left on the bench. Yet when Ayman Abdel-Aziz joined the team for the second half, the balance once again shifted in Zamalek's favour. The Egyptian team focused on defending their net, chancing only a few cautious counter-attacks. Their defense was strong and alert, and the tactic paid off as they succeeded in blocking their opponents' endless attempts on their goal. In particular, Zamalek's goalkeeper Nader El-Sayed showed outstanding zeal and skill in managing consistently to control the ball before it got too close to his net.

Although Zamalek depended more on their defense, while Yohang staked everything on a strategy of extensive attacks, and although on the day Zamalek managed to score whereas Yohang failed, it was clear that on balance the South Koreans were the stronger team, both in terms of endurance and of technique.

Knowing that they would be facing formidable opponents, Zamalek's coach Rud Crol had forbidden any fans or spectators to attend training sessions, so that they would not influence the players either way. He also gave the team long lectures and studied their opponent's tactics with them by watching videos of their games. Prior to the game, Rud Crol said his team would not be looking to attack too much, since the Koreans are well-known for their snappy counter-attacks from which they often score. Instead, he said, they would concentrate on a strong defence and carry out attacks only when necessary. He also said that three players would be specifically detailed to man-mark Korea's best three players.

And it worked. But Zamalek's Afro-Asian trophy is not just good news for Zamalek. It has also helped put a big smile on the faces of all Egyptian football fans, who saw their national team flunk out of the World Cup qualifiers, and then had to watch helpless as the two power-house teams, Ahli and Zamalek, contrived between them to lose most of this year's African and Arab championships. So then: all's well that ends well?

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El-Sayed Yassin:

Cultural specificity is not the answer; quantitative comparisons are absurd. Cosmopolitanism, then, is key



photo: Randa Shaath

An intellectual itinerary

El-Sayed Yassin *sits* at his desk, behind *piles of* open books and files spilling their contents. This is the desk of someone hard at work, who needs all his tools close at hand. His first words, however, are a warning that he refuses to be photographed where he is sitting, "because of the mess". He suggests the window as a background *and quickly tells us the story of a colleague he* admired, to deter us from insisting that he stay where he is. "Whenever I entered his office, I could observe that there was not the tiniest piece of paper out of place. His desk was a clean surface, which reflected only his face when he leaned forward to shake my hand. Everything was so tidy. All my life I have tried to emulate him, but, as you see, my attempts have never been crowned with any measure of success." Pro*tests that his lack of tidiness mirrors a trait of his* personality that should not be disregarded in the overall picture are shrugged off. He adamantly refuses to remain behind his desk, though he is really hard put to position himself against a background where the heavy tomes crowding the whole room are less visible. Finally he gives up and absentmindedly goes back to sit at the crammed table, while expounding on the necessity for the social scientist to be acquainted with several foreign languages, and the advantages of being able to read the research in the tongue it was originally written in.

This is in answer to the remark that, beside the large number of books in Arabic, there are a great many works of politics, anthropology and sociology in French and English on the shelves lining the wall. Of himself, El-Sayed Yassin is prepared to disclose very little. He is not forthcoming with details of his private life or of the honours recently bestowed on him. He is willing, however, to describe his working habits at some length. These, incidentally, are in direct contradiction with the untidiness of the desk. He follows a strict schedule, essential to a prolific writ*er who has further increased his output since* he officially retired from his post as head of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. Yassin seems in a hurry to steer the conversation towards his favourite topic, books.

The written word has played an essential role in Yassin's life, becoming his ever-present com*panion, which he discovered at an early stage of* his secluded and unconventional Alexandrian childhood, spent in a military fort in the small fishermen's village of Mex, near Alexandria, where his late father was serving as an officer of the coast guards. He has vivid memories of the fort overlooking the sea, to which admittance required a secret password, the knowledge of which was shared by very few visitors.

One of eight children, Yassin began reading at *a young age and was encouraged by his father,* who, although "not an intellectual in the usual sense of the word", says Yassin, was interested in international politics and avidly read the daily papers, which he commented on enthusiastically. Yassin grew up during the Second World War, "and there was much in the papers at the time," he says, "to stimulate [his] father's political opinions, which he was keen to share with his sons.

Yassin's brothers were all involved in some intellectual pursuit, and the household was one where books were part of everyday life.

The day eventually came when Yassin felt that he had exhausted the pleasures of perusing the reading material brought home by his father and brothers. He needed more. He then had the idea of visiting the Moharram Bey Municipal Library, where at *first, he was able to borrow and quickly* devour a great number of authors so far unknown to him, until, having become a selective reader, he would go there with a specific title in mind, only to find that the book was on loan, or temporarily misplaced, a frustration with which, as a researcher, he often had to deal in later years.

Returning empty-handed, he lamented the wasted time and the long, useless bus trip. Having thus been disappointed on countless occasions, Yassin finally invented a system whereby, having compiled a complete list of the works he intended to read in the following several years, he would, before each visit to the library, choose ten titles from his notebook — *which he kept until recently, he* says — and present them to the librarian. He was only allowed to borrow three books at a time and the odds, he had discovered, were strongly in favour of securing three out of the ten volumes in each of his preliminary selections.

Among the authors who marked him most during these formative years is the poet Khalil Gibran, whose complete works he immersed himself in, learning his poetry by heart, especially *The Prophet*, which he read in English.

Borrowing, however, did not completely satisfy Yassin's craving for the written word, and it is in a small bookshop of Al-Attarin, owned by a certain *Hagg* Ibrahim, that he experienced the first joys of possession, discovering rare editions of loved books, then haggling long and hard to secure their purchase. Tomes of Arabic and English poetry, literature and critical essays acquired from *Hagg* Ibrahim in those days still have pride of place on his bookshelves. English poets were especially attractive to him and, maybe under the influence of his older brother Rashad, who mastered the English language and the art of reciting verses, he began translating some of his favourite English poetry into Arabic.

Suddenly, however, just before 1950, his life as *a voracious scholar, dabbling in literature, literary* criticism and psychology, was to take a totally unexpected turn. He was convinced by one of his schoolmates to join the Muslim Brotherhood and, for a time, he became an active member in the organisation. From 1949 to 1951 he joined the Do'a School, which formed the cadres of the Brotherhood, then was chosen, along with several of his companions, to deliver the Friday sermon.

In 1954 he fell out with the group on political and ideological grounds, opposing their explicit condemnation of the Revolution at Friday prayers and remaining unconvinced that almsgiving was a cure for the social injustices he witnessed on the streets every day. Since the Brotherhood could not provide *all the answers to the world's prob*lems, as they had claimed they could, he began to look for new trends of thought. He was attracted for a while to Marxist theory and Russian revolutionary literature, which had become popular in Egypt after the revolution. He stopped short of adhering to a leftist party, however, having promised himself to preserve his independence after his stint with the Brotherhood. Later, when his knowledge of the social sciences expanded, as he joined the National Centre for Social and *Crim*inological Research, he became actively critical of some aspects of Marxism, with which, by then, he entertained no more than an epistemological relationship, being opposed in principle to the dictatorship of the proletariat. He remained attached to socialist ideals in general, however, a preponderant influence on his thoughts and writings in sociology during the late '50s and early '60s, finally adhering in the '70s to the school of cosmopolitanism.

Yassin thinks that, in fact, he had always adhered to cosmopolitanism without knowing it. After all, what else could an Alexandrian do?

Alexandria was the cosmopolitan city par excellence. Moreover, he had always been an eclectic reader, avid to discover international literature, fluent in English since childhood and in French *after several years spent in Paris. Having* gone there in order to acquire a Doctorate in Law, he had returned with a keen interest in social anthropology. In the study of this new passion, he had discovered the impossibility of value judgements and quantitative evaluations of the various degrees of civilisations reached by any given people at any given time – ideas gaining credence with the development of the modernisation theory. One must accept one's own culture: technological inferiority does not imply intrinsic inferiority in other areas. The "other" should be engaged from one's own vantage point, and, instead of pitting North against South, East against West, it is necessary to find common ground *where co-operation can be comfortably* established to the benefit of both sides.

In 1990, almost a year after the collapse of the Soviet Union, he went to Jordan, where he occupied the post of secretary-general of the Forum of Arab Thought. Recent developments begged a question, and Yassin was bound on finding the answer. At this point, he discovered globalism and post-modernism and turned his attention to the clash of civilisations, an idea that he emphat*ically rejected in favour of a dialogue between* equal partners. He developed these thoughts further during a series of international encounters, among them the second and third Arab-Japanese dialogues, the third Arab-Soviet dialogue and the first Arab-German dialogue.

For Yassin, the successful outcome of these contacts spells the ultimate triumph of cosmopolitanism, which, he thinks, should effectively combat the Islamists' call. He believes that claims of religious exclusivism *are nothing* but a dramatic step backwards, inspired by the refusal to deal with the "other" on equal terms — a refusal, he says, basically stemming from a misguided sense of superiority.

Today, Yassin has reached a vantage point of maturity. He can pause, look back and retrace the steps of his intellectual and political evolution. His feelings are best expressed by one of Gibran's lines. In essence, the poet declares. The entire earth is my fatherland, its *people* are *my* fellow-countrymen.

Profile by **Fayza Hassan**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ Well, my dears, I bet I am the first to wish you a merry Christmas, seeing that the festive season is barely upon us. In this case, however, *haste makes no* waste, since I am bringing happy tidings: the **Better Life Team**, conducted by Eng. **Maged Adel**, will be treating us to several of their much-anticipated full Christmas Programmes, appearing at *the* World Trade Centre on 22 December in two performances at 7.00 and 8.30pm respectively: at the Swissotel on 23 December at 7.00pm; and at the Sheraton Heliopolis on 24 December at 7.00pm. Now you can't say I didn't tell you. You can choose any of the above venues *if you want to* take the whole family and sing happily along, but beware: the last two are open-air affairs, so I would carry my warmest quilt under my arm if I were you. I have not finished, however, saving the best for last as usual. This year, **Better Life Team** are scheduled to sing at the Opera on 25 December at 8.00pm. No need for quilts there, but you have *to buy your own ticket, which* will be sold at the door at a token price, I am told. See you there, under the mistletoe.



photo: Sami Bushra





photo: Adel Ahmed

Clockwise from top left: Better Life Team; Deir El-Bahari march; a tourist with Pyramids School students; the students demonstrate against terrorism; the management trainers of the Hanns Seidel Foundation with their Egyptian counterparts

♣ Surely you know how terribly upset we all are at what happened in Luxor recently. Some of our young people decided to do something about it and have chosen a public expression of their sorrow and indignation at the shooting of innocent people. Three hundred schoolchildren, boys and girls attending Pyramids Language School, organised a march which started at the Mena House and ended at the foot of the Great Pyramid. Chanting anti-terrorist slogans, the youngsters marched, carrying small Egyptian flags, banners in Arabic and English, and flowers. At the Pyramids, they met with tourists, to whom they presented pamphlets which read "No East, No West — Egypt is the Best." Walking with the students, I noticed **Ahmed Nabil**, director of the school, as well as my good friend and colleague **Ahdaf El-Bendari**. Meanwhile in Luxor, another peace march was organised by the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports where hundreds of youngsters participated, *which culminated at Deir El-Bahari where the* Egyptian flag was raised at the foot of the Hatshepsut Temple while words of condemnation of the terrorists' action resounded in the cool air.

♦ And dears, AUC, the old alma mater, is at it again with a December programme full of surprises like the collection of folk tales from around the world cleverly adapted for the stage by Director **Eric Grichkat** and which is still playing until the 15th at Wallace Theatre, and if you have practiced like me the art of being at two places simultaneously, then don't miss the guitar recital of **Luzmaria Bobadilla** this highly talented Par*aguayan guitarist who will be* appearing on the same day same time but at the Oriental Hall. You may also want to attend the concert of the Osiris Singers who will perform excerpts from the musicals *Show Boat* and *Mame* under the direction of **Larry Catlin** on 17 December at 8.00pm at the Ewart Hall.

For the more business minded, *The Arab Common Market: Economic Constraints and Prospects* is the topic of the third lecture in the English Public Lectures Series, that you will be able to attend on 15 December at 5.00pm, at the Oriental Hall, and where I promise that you will be completely dazzled by the distinguished panelists, **Ibrahim Fawzi**, president of the General Authority for Investment and Free Zones, my dear friend **Adel Beshai**, AUC professor of economics **John Murray**, AUC distinguished lecturer of political science and **Samir Makary**, AUC professor of economics.

♥ Though serious matters have a place in life I like to keep them in their proper one and never let them deter me from more social gatherings especially if they are as unexpected as President of the Max Group **Maged Farag** and his charming wife's invitation to a dinner-concert in honour of **Ramzi Yassa**. The surprise *will be that this* time **Ramzi** will be on the listening side while the music will be made by a selected group of artists a couple of them quite young I am told. Ah for the old days when my rendition of a Chopin waltz was rewarded with nothing *less than a* standing ovation.

♠ Well darlings, some good friends are leaving us: *the* Management Training Project of the German Hanns Seidel Foundation is closing down its operations in Egypt after 15 years of management development activities. The Egyptian counterpart, the Ministry of Administrative Development, represented during the last years by Management Development Centre for Industry, is expected to continue the mission. **Peter Hartman**, the German director is *optimistic* about the continuation of the activities solely by the Egyptian side. **Sahar Zein**, executive director of the Egyptian side of the project, says that during the 15 years a unique spirit of cooperation was developed, allowing for the training of a large number of managers. **Sahar** is confident that they will continue the good work, and as they say, the goal of development workers is, after all, to work themselves out of a job.